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WWII MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES FROM THE U.S. HOME FRONT

AMERICA IN
WWII
SPECIAL ISSUE

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OF WWII
AMERICA**



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WAR TOO CLOSE TO HOME • MAYHEM**

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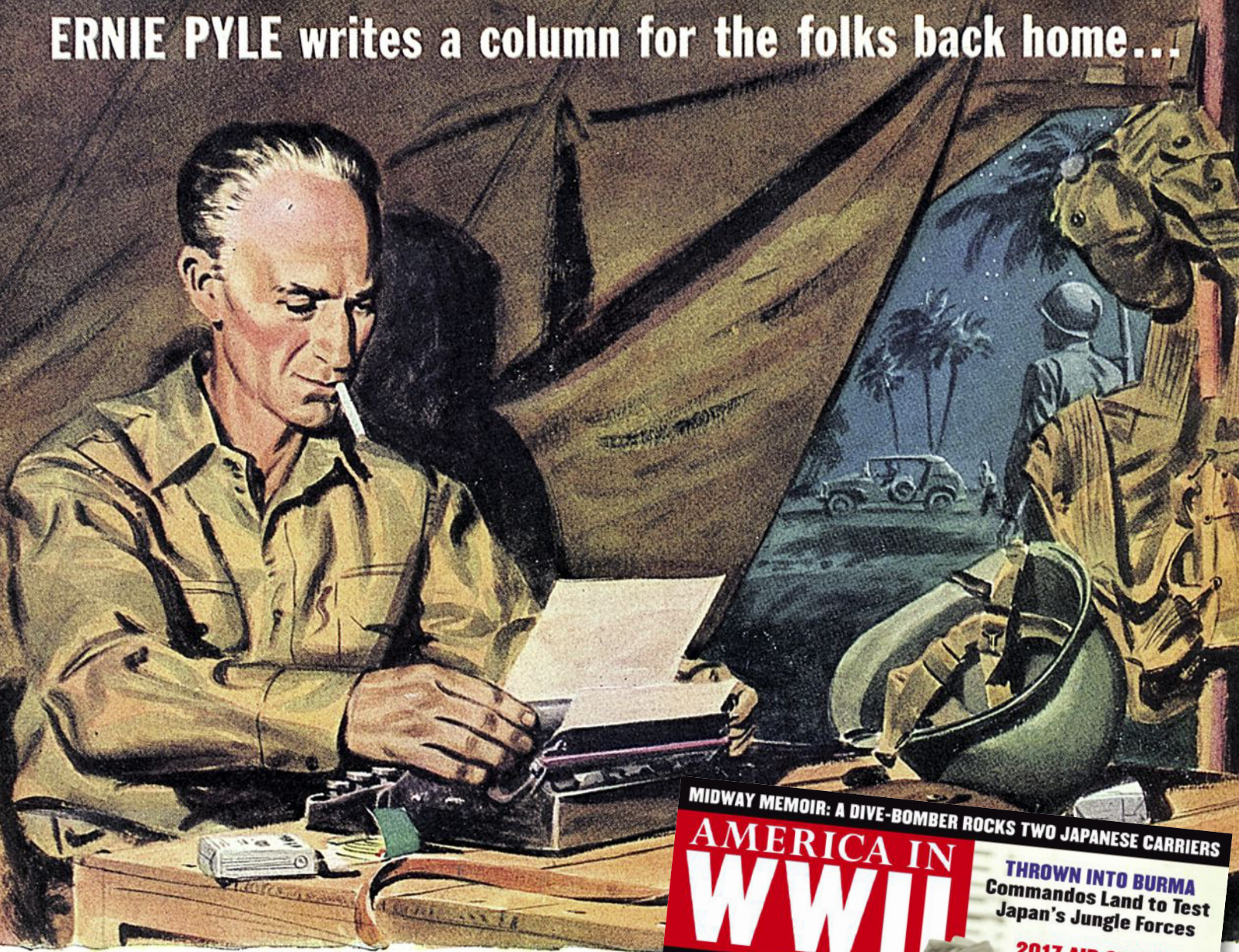
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FOR MURDER

Her careless talk costs lives

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1944

Distributed for the issuing agencies by the Office of War Information



WWII

AMERICA IN
WWII
SPECIAL ISSUE

COVER SHOT: *Poison gas! The very thought was chilling.*

Here, a GI works through a 1942 gas mask drill at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Later in the war, sick residents of Mattoon, Illinois, feared they were being gassed by the enemy.

PHOTO BY JACK DELANO FOR US OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

THIS SPREAD: *Uncle Sam has a word of advice for WWII Americans: Hush! The 1943 poster from which this image is taken has Uncle Sam saying "I'm counting on you!" He cautions, "Don't discuss: troop movements; ship sailings; war equipment."*

POSTER BY LEON HELGUERA. COURTESY OF NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

BACK COVER: *A 1942 poster by Glenn Ernest Grobe for the US Office for Emergency Management*

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MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES FROM THE U.S. HOME FRONT

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WWII MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES
FROM THE U.S. HOME FRONT

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Your connection to World War II America

Fear Didn't Stop Them

HAVE YOU EVER TOLD A STORY THAT YOU FIND HILARIOUS OR AMAZING, only to see your audience stare back at you blankly, expressionless, utterly unmoved? Perhaps you blushed a little, mumbled "I guess you had to be there..." and moved on.

Sometimes, when we dive into history and immerse ourselves in a bygone era, we're the ones left standing there blank, expressionless, and utterly unmoved, because we don't fully "get" the culture and people of the past. I ran into that problem years ago while working for a magazine about the American Civil War. I just didn't get most mid-19th-century humor. Looking through popular periodicals of the era, I'd run across a cartoon or perhaps a joke. Even though I had crammed my head with period jargon and expressions and endless information about the era, I never saw anything remotely amusing about those Victorian attempts at humor. I just didn't share the 19th century's cultural framework.

Working with World War II material, I run into that a lot less. I *do* get the jokes and cultural references. After all, my mom and dad were WWII people. Folks then looked, dressed, and spoke much like we do (at least a lot more than people of the 1800s did). Even so, there are things that don't come across at first, nuances we don't catch without lots of research, because we weren't there in the midst of those turbulent times and life-altering events.

Putting together this special issue took me a long way toward understanding an unspoken but important and ever-present reality of the American WWII home front: fear. We all know the WWII generation to have been plucky, brave, hardworking, ready to make sacrifices. But underlying everything, every day, was fear.

There was fear that loved ones serving overseas might not return, or might return broken or forever changed. There was fear that Axis enemies might attack on US soil via air raids, submarines, ground invasion, or secret agents and saboteurs. The government reinforced this fear, requiring civilians to black out their windows at night so enemy aircraft wouldn't be able to detect US towns. By day, trained civilian plane-spotters across the States scanned the skies, identifying every plane by its silhouette so they could report any enemy incursion. Meanwhile, government posters warned that spies were *everywhere*.

Home-front fear inspired great efforts and sacrifices. It also inspired ugly things, like the internment of Japanese, German, and Italian Americans. And for better or worse, it would shape US domestic and international policy to one degree or another for decades.

This special issue is a sampler of things that kept WWII Americans on edge. It is by no means exhaustive. But I think it provides important context to help us better understand and connect with the people of the WWII home front. They helped fight and win the war through their industrial production, volunteerism, financial support, and sacrifice—and through their prayer and support for the military personnel overseas. Knowing they did all that with fear gnawing relentlessly at their souls makes me admire them all the more.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Jim Kushlan
Publisher/*America in WWII* magazine

DOCUMENTS
ROOM

THE SOUND THAT KILLS



1. SOUND WAVES TRAVEL AT 1100 FT. PER SECOND. IF AMPLIFIED, SOUND CAN GO ROUND THE WORLD

AM I HUNGRY! WE LOADED THE EXETER IN 6 HOURS. SHE SAILS AT NOON

GOOD JOB, BILL



2. TALK IS SOUND. IT TRAVELS IN WAVES. EVEN A FRIENDLY REMARK TRAVELS ENDLESSLY IN ORDINARY CONVERSATION



3. IT CAN GO ACROSS TOWN IN CARS AND SUBWAYS ... TO FALL ON MANY EARS



4. TO BE PICKED UP AND AMPLIFIED BY THE WRONG PEOPLE ... IN THE WRONG PLACES.



5. IT GOES UNDER THE SEA ... TO A GERMAN U-BOAT ... AND BECOMES A WEAPON IN THE ENEMIES' HANDS.



6. THE END OF A RUMOR ... AND THE END OF THE EXETER.

DON'T MURDER MEN WITH IDLE WORDS

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U.S. NAVY L-8

WWII MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM • Part 1



MYSTERIES



ghost blimp

It was odd enough for a US Navy dirigible to crash down in a California coastal town.

But where was the crew?

To this day, no one knows.

by **Chuck Lyons**



W

ghost blimp by Chuck Lyons

HAT HAPPENED TO LIEUTENANT ERNEST CODY and Ensign Charles Adams in August 1942? Rumors continue to circulate to this day. Were they captured by the Japanese? Did they conceive and execute a complicated AWOL scheme? Did they get into a fight and kill each other, or were they killed by a stowaway? Were they abducted by aliens?

All we know for sure is that navy blimp *L-8*, which Cody and Adams were operating off the California coast, drifted ashore, snagged on a cliff at Ocean Beach, then broke free, dropping one of its depth charges on the Olympic Club golf course and finally crashing in the road in the 400 block of Bellevue Avenue in Daly City, California. When rescuers arrived, they found the airship empty. Cody and Adams simply weren't there. "There was something eerie about it," one of the responding firefighters later said. "We got chills down our spines, and we couldn't wait till we got out of there."

The blimp's parachutes were stored neatly in the gondola where they should have been, but two lifejackets were missing. The life raft was still aboard, the radio was in good working order, and a file of classified information was still in the gondola. Neither land nor sea searches turned up any sign of the two men.

An official inquiry held days after the incident declared Cody and Adams missing. They were pronounced dead a year later. To this day, the mystery of what came to be called the Ghost Blimp remains unsolved. It is one of the greatest mysteries in the history of the US Navy.

The story's background began in the aftermath of the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, when the navy became more and more concerned about enemy submarines lurking along US coasts. In the first half of 1942, Allied ships had been sunk along the East Coast, in the Gulf of Mexico, and within sight of San Diego and Los Angeles on the West Coast. Submarines had shelled shore facilities in Southern California and Oregon.

The navy believed blimps were the key to defending against this threat. A submerged submarine was difficult to spot in a heaving sea; it left only a thin trail of bubbles as it retracted its periscope, a quickly disappearing oil slick, or a vague shadow beneath the waves—traces that were all but impossible to spot from the deck of a ship or from a fast-moving airplane. But blimps could hover in one spot for a better view, they had a range of more than 2,000 miles, and they could stay aloft for nearly 12 hours.

The navy had contracted with Goodyear Aircraft Company in 1937 to produce a series of L-class blimps, relatively small airships based on Goodyear's commercial model. One of these was

the *L-8*, which was commissioned in March 1942 and became part of ZP-32, or Airship Patrol Squadron 32 (later called Blimp Squadron 32), based at Moffett Field just south of San Francisco near Sunnyvale, California.

The next month, on April 11, the *L-8* was chosen to deliver 300 pounds of B-25 bomber parts to the carrier USS *Hornet* (CV-8) off the California coast. The parts were for the planes of Lieutenant Colonel James "Jimmy" Doolittle's raiders, who were aboard the *Hornet* and on their way to bomb Japan.

The mission assigned to the *L-8* on Sunday, August 16, was mundane by comparison to the *Hornet* delivery. The blimp was to take off from Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay for a routine patrol. But before takeoff, the *L-8*'s ground crew determined that

the ship was about 200 pounds overweight. To compensate, Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class James Riley Hill was cut from the blimp's three-man crew.

That left the pilot, 27-year-old Lieutenant Ernest DeWitt Cody, who had graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1938 and had piloted the *L-8* before, and 38-year-old Ensign Charles E. Adams, who had had 20 years' experience with lighter-than-air vehicles as an enlisted man. Adams had been sworn in as an ensign the day before and was making his first flight as a commis-

sioned officer. He had been at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941, and had fired a deck gun at enemy planes. He had also been part of the ground crew during the crash of the German Zeppelin *Hindenburg* at Lakehurst, New Jersey, in May 1937. Both men were married.

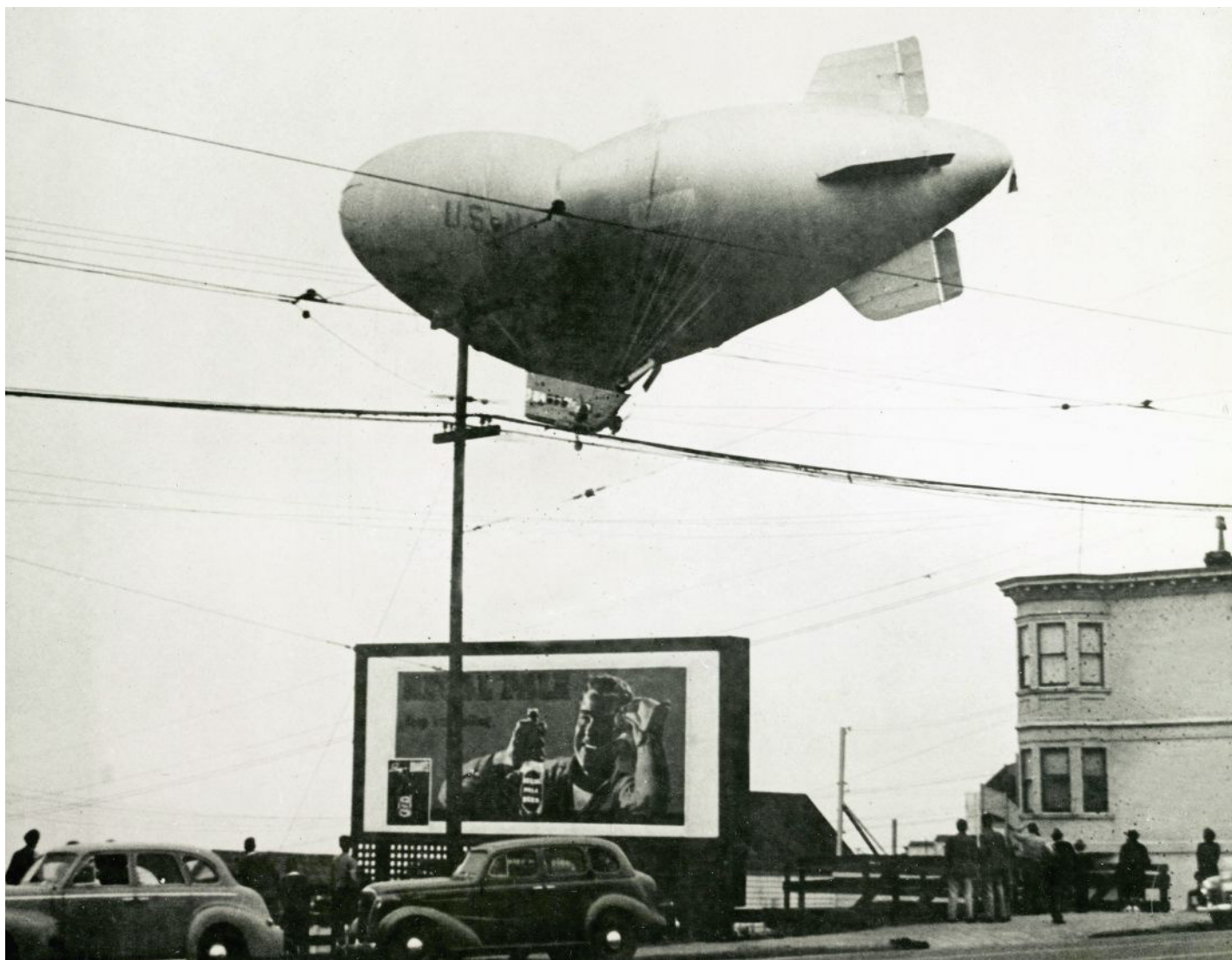
The *L-8* finally took off at 6:03 A.M. and headed out to patrol for enemy submarines in an area bordered by San Francisco Bay, the Farallones (a chain of small islands 30 miles west of the Golden Gate Bridge), and Point Reyes, on the coast 25 miles north of the bridge. At 7:42, Cody radioed that he and Adams had spotted what appeared to be an oil slick—a typical sign of submarine activity—five miles off the Farallones and that the *L-8* was going down to investigate.

Cody and Adams were never heard from again. Beginning at 8:50 A.M., repeated radio calls were made to the airship but without response. Finally, sometime between 9:30 and 10 A.M., a mes-



Previous spread: The US Navy blimp *L-8* comes in for a landing on September 2, 1942, less than a month after the airship became the center of an enduring mystery. Above: The *L-8* was part of Airship Patrol Squadron 32, or ZP-32, based at Moffett Field south of San Francisco. Blimps like the *L-8* (and the one featured on this Christmas card) flew from Moffett Field on offshore patrols, searching for enemy submarines.

Opposite: One such patrol, on August 16, 1942, ended with the *L-8* limping into Daly City, California, and crashing down onto a street.



sage was sent out to all aircraft in the area asking them to keep watch for the *L-8*. The pilot of a Pan American Clipper reported seeing the blimp at 10:49 but said he noticed nothing obviously amiss. About 11:05, an army P-38 Lightning fighter also spotted the *L-8*, near Mile Rocks Light, a lighthouse close to the main shipping channel and about a half-mile from land.

About 10 minutes later, people on the beach near Daly City, 9 or 10 miles south of the Golden Gate Bridge, noticed the *L-8* drifting in from sea. Two men swimming in the water attempted to grab its guide ropes, but the blimp eluded them. It crossed the beach, apparently driven by the wind, and disappeared behind hills. "It was dished on top and appeared to be drifting with its motors off," said witness Bruce McIntyre. "It came in over Mussel Rock very low, then over the hill back of us. It was so low I could see shroud lines almost touching the hilltop."

The blimp then floated up again, striking a cliff and dropping one of its two depth charges on the Olympic Club's golf course. Fortunately, the charge did not explode. Later investigation would show that the starboard depth charge rack had been damaged by the impact with the cliff, which had torn the charge loose.

The *L-8* drifted on, scraping the roofs of homes, striking power lines, and spraying sparks before settling onto the road in the 400 block of Daly City's Bellevue Avenue. William Morris, a volunteer

fireman who lived near the scene of the crash, was the first to reach the downed airship. "The doors were open," he said, "and nobody was in the cabin."

MORE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS ARRIVED and tore open the blimp's fabric covering to see if somehow the crew, or an intruder, had become trapped inside. They found nothing. Navy personnel arrived and saw that the two lifejackets that were to be worn by the crew were missing. That was not unexpected. Crew members were required to wear their lifejackets whenever they were over water. But the ship's parachutes were in their proper place, the navy investigators noted. The life raft was stowed in its spot, and the radio was still in good working order. Most of the fuel had been dumped, and the controls for the ship's engines were still switched to the on position. The two throttles were in positions that indicated the airship had been turning.

Perhaps most alarming was the discovery of a file containing classified information, still in the gondola. Loss of such documents would have been a court-martial offense for any serviceman involved. Cody and Adams would not have left those documents behind by choice.

There was no indication that there had been a fire or any damage aboard the *L-8*, other than rips in the ship's fabric caused by

ghost blimp

by Chuck Lyons

the rooftops of Daly City and the actions of the volunteer firefighters, or the bent propellers caused by the collision with the cliff. One of the engines was packed with dirt from hitting the cliff. But a check of the helium gas valves showed they were set exactly as they should have been, and the *L-8* had been perfectly airworthy.

Shortly after the *L-8* was taken back to base, rumors and false reports began to spread. One story claimed that early responders had found a sandwich in the cockpit with one bite out of it and a cup of coffee that had partially spilled on papers lying on the cockpit desk. Some versions claimed the coffee was still warm. The navy later refuted these stories. The navy also received a telephone call saying that Cody and Adams had left the ship at Fort Funston, just north of Daly City, and were safe. That claim, too, proved false.

A search commenced in the area where *L-8* had struck the cliff and widened to a broader sea and land search, with no success. The coast guard continued the search for several days, and navy patrols were kept on alert for any sight of the men. Even if the two men had drowned, the navy said, their lifejackets should have kept their bodies afloat. But they were not found.

The navy convened a board of inquiry days later, and two fishermen testified that they had seen the *L-8* in the area from which Cody had radioed his sighting of the oil slick. The fishermen said they saw the airship descend to about 300 feet above the ocean's surface and circle. At no time, the men reported, did either of them see anything fall or drop from the airship. They had pulled in their nets, they said, expecting the airship to drop a depth charge.

Instead, the blimp soared upward and disappeared in the clouds.

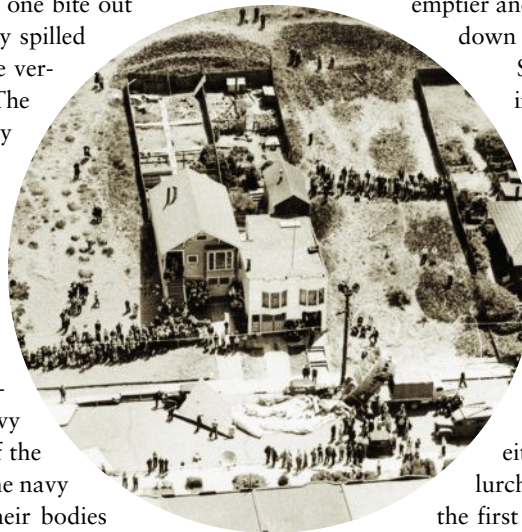
Addressing the sag in the top of the airship that McIntyre and other witnesses had mentioned, the board concluded that it formed once the weight of the crew was no longer present. This lightening of the *L-8*'s load would have caused the blimp to rise to 2,500 feet. There, an automatic relief valve would have opened, releasing helium and bringing the airship down again. With the blimp now emptier and softened, the weight of the gondola pulling down at the center caused the top to sag.

Such explanations did not come close to solving the mystery of what happened to Cody and Adams. Finally, the board of inquiry had no choice but to rule that the two men's disappearance was unexplained.

The mystery of the Ghost Blimp persists to this day, though some theorists have put forth plausible suggestions as to what may have happened. One scenario suggests that one of the men fell out of the gondola because the door was left unsecured. The second man was ejected either when the blimp, suddenly lightened, lurched at an odd angle or when he tried to catch the first man. This theory seems to fit with the discovery of the throttles being set to turn the airship.

Significantly, mechanic Riley Hill, the third crewmember who was ordered off the flight, later testified that he did not secure the door when he left the gondola.

In a similar vein, some emergency might have required one of the men to leave the gondola and climb onto the balloon itself, a circumstance that occurred from time to time. That man could have fallen, and the loss of his weight, as in the previous sugges-



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

lighter than air

a blimp, unlike a hot air balloon, is a lighter-than-air vehicle that is powered and can be steered. It is a type of dirigible (literally meaning "steerable") but does not have a rigid internal skeleton.

The blimp *L-8* was 150 feet long, about 47 feet at its widest, and had an envelope that held 123,000 cubic feet of gas. It was powered by two 145-horsepower engines, could reach a speed of 61 mph, cruised at 46 mph, and was armed with machine guns and two depth charges. Besides locating enemy submarines, *L-8* was considered capable of attacking them.

L-8, like all US blimps, was filled with helium, a non-flammable gas that the United States possessed in large quantities. At the time, America



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Above: With its bow tethered to a truck-mounted mobile mast, the blimp *L-8* sits moored and at the ready at Moffett Field.

supplied 90 percent of the world's commercial helium.

After the *L-8*'s crash in August 1942, the airship was repaired and served as a navy training ship for the remainder of the war. Afterward, it was returned to Goodyear, and the gondola was put into

storage. In 1968 it was rebuilt and served until 1982 as part of the Goodyear blimp *America*, televising sporting events.

The *L-8*'s gondola is now on display at the United States Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida.

CHUCK LYONS



Opposite, top: Seen from the sky from which it fell, the *L-8* lies on Bellevue Avenue in Daly City. The blimp's deflated envelope is a rumpled heap and its crashed gondola stands on end as a navy truck prepares to haul it. The blimp's parts were all accounted for—but where were the *L-8*'s two crewmen? Above: Daly City residents watch from a distance as military personnel grapple with the mystery of the missing aviators.

tion, could have bounced the second man out of the gondola.

The excess weight that the ground crew noticed before takeoff gave rise to other theories. At the board of inquiry, Lieutenant Commander George F. Watson, commanding officer of ZP-32, said that mechanic Hill was bumped from the flight because the *L-8* was found to be 200 pounds too heavy. But Watson could not explain where the extra 200 pounds had come from. "There was no rain that week," he said. "While San Francisco morning fog may add weight, I would be puzzled why it would differ from day to day. Flights the prior day were exposed to the same elements...and carried three men. This puzzled me. Who or what accounted for the extra 200 pounds?"

WATSON SPECULATED IN HIS TESTIMONY that "the most obvious thing to consider was that someone was hiding aboard already, and this intruder then sprang out, shot the pilots, dumped their bodies overboard, rendezvousing with a submarine and escaping." Intruders had been discovered trying to get into buildings at Treasure Island a couple of weeks earlier.

This theory would explain the added 200 pounds, but it doesn't explain why an intruder would not have taken the classified documents that were aboard the airship. Besides, Watson concluded there simply was no place to hide "on or above the gondola without being seen." So either there was no intruder or Watson

was mistaken about a determined stowaway's ability to hide aboard a blimp.

When the *L-8* was recovered, its battery was almost drained, but nothing seemed to account for this loss of charge. The gondola, said Watson, showed no sign of coming in contact with water, which might have caused a power discharge.

Other investigators have hypothesized that Cody and Adams spotted an enemy sub and descended only to be killed or captured by the submarine's crew. It seems unlikely, however, that the blimp's operators would have failed to radio their base before moving in. And the enemy would certainly have taken the classified documents from the gondola.

In the end, despite the best efforts of navy and private investigators who have been examining the incident for the last 75 years, our knowledge of what happened to Cody and Adams remains the same as it was in 1942 when a navy spokesman admitted "Nothing the navy knows now has given a satisfactory explanation of what happened." The fate of the *L-8*'s crew remains a mystery, and probably always will. ★

CHUCK LYONS *has written about the accidental bombing of an Oklahoma city, a devastating 1942 nightclub fire in Boston, the wartime proliferation of "Kilroy was here" graffiti, and other topics for America in WWII.*

THE BATTLE

of Los Angeles

Air raid sirens. Spotlights. Gunfire. Panic in the middle of the night.
Japanese warplanes were raiding California!

Or were they...?

by Chuck Lyons



GTimes
FREEDOM



ARY 26, 1942.

202

Times

TRUE INDUSTRIAL FREEDOM

MAY 26, 1942.

DAILY, FIVE

ALARM REAL

Roaring Guns

Mark Black

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Five Deaths

Raid to Raid

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INFORMATION, PLEASE

(Editorial)

A considerable public excitement and confusion by yesterday morning's supposed enemy air attack on this area and its spectacular official accompaniment to The Times that more specific public information should be forthcoming from government sources seems to require clarification.

The subject, if only to clarify their own so far conflicting statements about it.

The five-hour blackout was ordered by the Army's 4th Air Force Command and the ensuing heavy and long-continued anti-aircraft firing was also on official Army orders. It seems clear, then, that the responsible Army command in this area were convinced that enemy aircraft would make a head and that no effort should be spared to shoot them down before they could attack, by bombs or other means.

An official statement, made public later yesterday afternoon at San Francisco headquarters, the Western Front said that "unidentified aircraft were seen in the area" and that "no bombs were dropped."

The fact that there was a considerable amount of activity in the area and that "no bombs were dropped" is a very different matter from the "official" statement that "no bombs were dropped."

Five Deaths Laid to Raid Blackout

Blackout

Traffic Accidents and Heart Attacks Take Lives of Quintette

of five
offic

Deaths of five persons—
three in traffic accidents, er
two as victims of heart at-
tacks—were listed as direct-
ly attributable to the five-hour
blackout in Los Angeles Coun-
ty yesterday morning.
The inky blackness also re-
sulted in injuries to scores of

were in-
 tributable to the
 bout in Los Angeles
 yesterday morning.
 The inky blackness also result-
 ed in injuries to scores of other persons.
 Mrs. Zenadah Klein, 48, of 1007
 Mayflower St., Arcadia, was
 killed when an automobile in-
 which she was riding collided
 during the blackout with a milk
 truck driven by Mrs. Goldie L.
 Wagner, 50, of 2510 S. 10th St.,
 Arcadia, during the early morn-
 ing hours at 1600 S. 10th St.
 Mrs. Klein's husband, Harry

Roaring Guns Mark Black

Mark Black

Identity of Aircraft Veiled in Mystery
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THE BATTLE of Los Angeles by Chuck Lyons

SIRENS WAILED THROUGH LOS ANGELES in the wee hours of February 25, 1942. Air raid wardens ran to their posts. Shell-bursts, sweeping searchlights, and the bright streaks of tracer bullets split the dark sky. This was not a drill. Civilians crowded the hills around the city and stood on rooftops, scouring the night sky for Japanese planes. Cars crashed amid the confusion. The City of Angels, it seemed, was under attack.

As dawn crept in, the firing had stopped and soon the morning newspapers hit the streets. “L.A. Area Raided!” shouted a half-page headline on page one of the *Los Angeles Times*. “Jap Planes Peril Santa Monica...,” read the subhead. The *Los Angeles Examiner* reported that civilian witnesses had seen as many as 50 enemy planes over the city. Three had been shot down over the ocean to the west, it said.

But the light of morning showed there had been no attack, and no enemy planes had been shot down. Various described as a case of war jitters, a false alarm, and even a UFO attack, what history came to call the Great Los Angeles Air Raid—or the Battle of Los Angeles—ended with some 1,400 anti-aircraft shells fired, seven people dead, and area residents and military authorities scratching their heads. What really had happened?

Real Japanese Bombs

AFTER THE December 1941 attack on the US Pacific Fleet in Hawaii’s Pearl Harbor, communities along America’s West Coast feared they might fall within striking distance of Japan’s sea and air forces. They began suffering from what historians have called “invasion fever,” a general uneasiness and fear that first showed itself a day after the Pearl Harbor attack. That day, December 8, 1941, military officials terrified San Francisco residents by calling a sudden air raid alert. The decision was based on reports of incoming Japanese planes and an aircraft carrier offshore, reports that were later called into question.

Adding to the unease in those early months of the war, it was

common knowledge that Japanese submarines routinely patrolled off the West Coast and were responsible for sinking several merchant ships in the area. On February 23, 1942, one of those submarines, *I-17*, entered the Santa Barbara Channel and shelled the Ellwood Oil Field, about 12 miles offshore from Santa Barbara and just north of Los Angeles. The attack came while President Franklin D. Roosevelt was delivering one of his Fireside Chats to the nation via radio. During the talk, Roosevelt warned that “the broad oceans which have been heralded in the past as our protection from attack have become endless battlefields on which we are

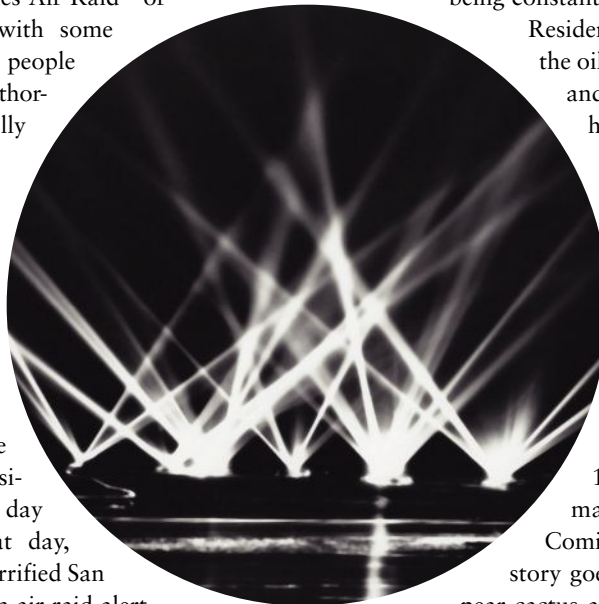
being constantly challenged by our enemies.”

Residents of the Santa Barbara area witnessed the oilfield attack. “We heard a whistling noise and a thump as a projectile hit near the house,” recounted John Hollister III, who was 10 years old at the time. After about 20 minutes, the *I-17* ceased firing and withdrew. “We knew we were at war before then,” resident Ruth Pratt later said. “And after that we definitely knew it.”

A story persists that *I-17*’s skipper, Commander Kozo Nishino, shelled the Ellwood facility to avenge a humiliation he had suffered there in the late 1930s. At that time, Nishino had commanded a tanker that stopped there.

Coming ashore from his docked tanker, the story goes, Nishino slipped and fell on a prickly pear cactus and was laughed at. But the truth, argue some historians, is that Nishino bombed the Ellwood facility because it was an undefended strategic target.

The *I-17*’s shelling of the oilfield was the first hostile fire directed against the American homeland since the War of 1812. But



Previous spread: “ARMY SAYS ALARM REAL” shouts the *Los Angeles Times* on February 26, 1942. Early on the 25th, army guns lit the sky, shooting at Japanese planes. But were the planes real? Above: Lights rise from LA’s harbor in a wartime show of readiness. The city was on edge early in the war. When a Japanese sub shelled a California oil field on February 23, navy officials decided an attack on LA was next. The army put LA on alert. Top: Air attacks were unlikely, but neighborhood air raid wardens—with helmets like this—kept Americans ready, enforcing alerts and drills. Opposite: A warden shows how to hide interior light during blackouts, which made towns invisible.



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damage was slight. The sub fired only 16 or 17 shells. Some landed on the beach. Others struck and damaged a pier and destroyed an oil derrick and a pump house. But the attack's real impact was on local morale. Some Santa Barbara residents fled. Rumors spread that the Ellwood was just a prelude to a larger attack against Los Angeles.

LOYAL JAPANESE AMERICANS in the region had predicted an attack would be made during FDR's radio address, according to historian William A. Goss's 1948 analysis "Air Defense of the Western Hemisphere," a chapter in the first volume of *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, the US Army Air Forces' official history of the air war. Japanese American sources believed a larger attack would be made on Los Angeles shortly thereafter. Blinking lights and even flares had been seen near LA's vital aircraft and defense plants, some people said. Were these signals from secret operatives to would-be attackers? "Los Angeles was darn near in a panic," wrote US Army Lieutenant Donald V. Bennett, a future general whose field artillery battalion had just been sent to California. "...An armada was expected to be off Long Beach within a day or two."

At least one witness claimed, erroneously, that *I-17* had headed south toward LA after shelling the Ellwood oilfield. Other area residents claimed they had seen what they called "signal lights" from out at sea. As a result, a blackout—the mandatory nighttime extinguishment or concealment of all light to make a community invisible to enemy aircraft and, in coastal areas, to ships and submarines offshore—was declared for the Los Angeles area until morning.

A Stage Set for Panic

IN THIS ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR and uncertainty, Goss writes, the US Navy announced its belief that an attack was imminent on Southern California and Los Angeles, which was then the fifth-largest city in the United States with a population of about 1.5 million people. At 7:18 P.M. on February 24, military officials put LA's air defenses on alert, only to cancel three hours later. Then, at about 2:15 A.M. on February 25, radar picked up something over the Pacific about 120 miles west of the city. Anti-aircraft units went onto high alert, and a blackout was ordered at 2:21 A.M. By then, the mysterious object had disappeared from radar, but anti-aircraft batteries in and around Los Angeles were put on ready-to-fire status. Emergency centers were already receiving a trickle of telephone calls about enemy planes being spotted.

Air raid alarms sounded and air wardens scurried to their posts. At about 3:15 A.M., the 37th Coast Artillery Brigade began responding to the reports of enemy planes by firing .50-caliber machine guns and 12.8-pound anti-aircraft shells. Planes from the air forces' 4th Interceptor Command were readied to meet incoming enemy aircraft, but they never took off. "The next three hours produced some of the most imaginative reporting of the war," the official air force history says.

Pandemonium in LA

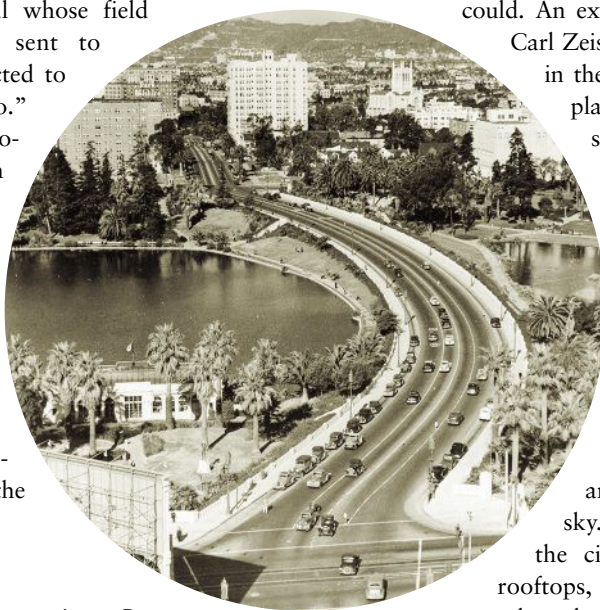
HUNDREDS OF PLANES were reported over the city, and searchlights played across the sky, highlighting the bursts of anti-aircraft shells, which may themselves have been mistaken for more enemy planes. A coastal artillery colonel reported having spotted "about twenty-five planes at 12,000 feet." Long Beach Police Chief J.H. McClelland said, "I watched what was described as the second wave of planes from atop the seven-story Long Beach City Hall. I

did not see any planes but the younger men with me said they could. An experienced Navy observer with powerful

Carl Zeiss binoculars said he counted nine planes in the cone of the searchlight. The group (of planes) passed along from one battery of searchlights to another, and under fire from the anti-aircraft guns, flew from the direction of Redondo Beach and Inglewood on the land side of Fort MacArthur, and continued toward Santa Ana and Huntington Beach. Anti-aircraft fire was so heavy we could not hear the motors of the planes."

Shortly after 3 A.M., reports of a balloon carrying a red flare over Santa Monica came in, and four batteries of anti-aircraft artillery opened fire at the sky. Area residents stood on the hills around the city, in front of their homes, on the rooftops, and in the city's streets, watching the spectacle and swapping stories they had heard of planes crashing into the sea and around the city. There were actual reports of four enemy planes being shot down, including one from the 77th street police station that had a Japanese plane crashing in flames at a Hollywood intersection. "There were sirens, searchlights, even antiaircraft guns blamming away," recalled Arthur Ralph Blum, who was nine years old when he witnessed the spectacle. "...I went out onto the upstairs balcony.... It was after three in the morning. Searchlights probed the western sky. Tracers streamed upward. The racket was terrific." Another eyewitness reported, "The air over Los Angeles erupted like a volcano."

Finally, at 7:21 A.M., the all-clear sounded. Local children spent the morning picking up pieces of shrapnel in the streets and on the city's beaches. But there were no enemy planes. Daylight proved



Above: Wartime Los Angeles, home to 1.5 million people. After a tense alert on the evening of February 24, all seemed calm. But at 2:21 A.M. sirens screamed as the army imposed a blackout. Radar had detected something offshore. Opposite: Around 3:15 A.M., anti-aircraft guns opened fire. In this photo, the bright blob left of center is a shell-burst. The other bright spots are stars, doubled by double exposure.



ATTACKS

Real and Imagined

If Japan or Germany had decided to attack the US mainland in World War II, Americans would have been ready. Along the nation's east and west coasts, and even in the Midwest heartland, civil defense officials made sure civilians practiced and drilled until they knew exactly what to do if enemy bombers appeared overhead.

Such an attack was extremely unlikely, of course, considering how far enemy planes would have to fly to reach their targets. Most reports of imminent Japanese or German attacks on the US mainland came early in the war and turned out to be spurious. New York City, for instance, was ready for the worst on December 9, 1941, two days after the Pearl Harbor attack. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, newly appointed director of the federal Office of Civilian Defense, had made an unsettling national radio address the previous day. "...I want to be realistic," he said regarding the potential Axis threat to the mainland United States. "The situation is serious."

Into this tense atmosphere, reports came in at noon on December 9 that German planes had been spotted off the East Coast and would reach New York City in about two hours. Defense officials called an air raid alert. Radio stations fell silent, schools closed, and police sirens wailed to signal the public (civil defense sirens had not yet been installed). It was a false alarm. No one died as a result of it.

It was perhaps wise that Americans kept at least some degree of caution about enemy attacks, however, because on a few rare occasions, attacks—like the Japanese submarine *I-17's* shelling of the Ellwood Oil Field near Santa Barbara, California, on February 23, 1942—were quite real. Later in 1942, for example, the Japanese sub *I-25* made a pair of small air attacks in Oregon that were dubbed the Lookout Air Raids. In June, it used its guns to bombard Fort Stevens, at the mouth of the Columbia River—to little effect.

Then, in September, the sub launched its Yokosuka E14Y seaplane (a "Glen" in US parlance) on a failed bombing raid that was meant to start a forest fire in the Siskiyou State Forest near Brookings. Howard "Razz" Gardner, manning a fire lookout tower on Mount Emily, saw the plane fly in and saw smoke afterward. He and another lookout-tower man contained the fire until a larger crew arrived and extinguished it. Little damage was done. The bombing attempt was repeated on the 29th, but with no success.

Later in the war, in 1944 and 1945, Japan released more



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Almost as fanciful as enemy bombers soaring over America was the government's advice on what citizens should do if a bomb actually landed. This comic-book intro to bomb disposal, by Honolulu artist E.J. Stephenson, spells out the process frame by frame.

than 9,000 bomb-laden paper hydrogen balloons into the jet stream. Air currents carried the balloons across the Pacific to at least 17 US states and to Canada and Mexico. On May 5, 1945, at Bly, Oregon, a pastor's pregnant wife and five Sunday-school children 11 to 14 years old noticed one of these balloons on the ground near a site where they planned to picnic. As they approached it, the balloon's bomb went off, and all were killed. The other potentially deadly balloons caused no harm.

On the East Coast, in addition to infiltration of German spies sent to create chaos and damage war production, there was the very real danger of U-boats. These German submarines posed no real threat to shore communities (except to deliver spies). But from January through August 1942, before the United States organized a successful defense of its coastal waters, U-boats sank more than 600 merchant ships just off American shorelines, sometimes within view from the beach.

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that none had been brought down in Hollywood or in the Pacific west of the city. No bombs had been dropped, either.

Several buildings in the city had been damaged by anti-aircraft shell fragments, however, and there had been numerous auto accidents on the blacked-out streets. Five people had died from falling shrapnel and accidents. One of them, 59-year-old police sergeant E. Larsen, had been killed en route to an air raid post. Two others, including a 63-year-old state military reservist at the wheel of an ammunition truck, had died of apparent heart attacks during the confusion.

Three Japanese people, two men and a woman, were arrested at Venice Beach on suspicion of signaling with flashlights near the pier and were turned over to the FBI.

Looking for Answers

MILITARY AND CIVILIAN officials were as confused as anyone about what had happened. A morning edition of the *Los Angeles Times* blared “Army Says Alarm Real.” The newspaper published a picture of a local resident holding a pillow that had been shredded by shrapnel. Another photo showed a resident holding an unexploded 12-pound anti-aircraft shell.

As the city slowly settled back into its normal routine, questions emerged. “Attempts to arrive at an explanation of the incident quickly became as complicated and mysterious as the ‘attack’ itself,” wrote Goss. Some simply blamed “war nerves,” which had certainly played a part. But what had triggered the mass hysteria?

US Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox announced that the “attack” had begun with the sighting of what was actually a weather balloon. Once anti-aircraft fire began, shell-bursts were themselves mistaken for additional enemy planes. The whole thing was, he said, a “false alarm.” At the same time, he admitted that attacks were always possible and urged defense industries to move inland.

Army brass in the area at first declared that “most previous reports had been greatly exaggerated,” but then said that one to five “unidentified planes” had been flying over Los Angeles. Secretary of War Henry Stimson seemed to accept the latter explanation and suggested that the “unidentified planes” had been launched from secret Japanese airfields or Japanese submarines. In either case, he said, the planes had been attempting to locate defensive anti-aircraft batteries in the Los Angeles area or simply trying to demoralize the city’s population.

Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall suggested the “attack” might have begun with a faulty recognition of commer-

cial aircraft, but was possibly part of a psychological warfare campaign. He wrote a secret memo to Roosevelt trying to explain what had happened.

FOR YEARS AFTERWARD—and even today—people have claimed the so-called Battle of Los Angeles was started by a UFO sighting. To some eyes, a photo in the *Los Angeles Times* on February 26, 1942, shows a UFO caught in crossing searchlights. Hundreds of witnesses claimed they had seen the object, which reportedly remained motionless over the city and then began moving slowly away. The photo has spawned countless websites and blogs.

As the army and navy fumbled around trying to explain what had happened, newspapers began attacking them, accusing them of a cover-up or outright incompetence. “There is a mysterious reticence about the whole affair and it appears some form of censorship is trying to halt discussion of the matter,” said the *Long Beach Independent*, voicing a belief that has further fueled the UFO theory.

US Representative Leland Ford of Santa Monica called for a congressional investigation. The *New York Times* chimed in on February 28, saying that if the city’s guns had been firing at nothing at all, it was a sign of “expensive incompetence,” but if they had been firing at actual enemy planes, why had none been hit? “What would have happened if this had been a real air raid?” the newspaper asked.

In time the recriminations and furor died down. At the end of the war, the Japanese officially claimed that they had never sent any planes over the area on the night of the Great Los Angeles Air Raid.

The most logical explanation of what triggered the event appears to be the weather balloon theory first mentioned by Knox. Goss writes, “A careful study of the evidence suggests that meteorological balloons—known to have been released over Los Angeles—may have caused the initial alarm. After the firing started, careful observation was difficult because of

drifting smoke from shell burst.... It is hard to see, in any event, what enemy purpose would have been served by an attack in which no bombs were dropped.”

So, weather balloons were reported as enemy planes, guns started to fire, and fear and confusion took over. Sightings multiplied and rumors spread in a city that already “was darn near in a panic,” as young Lieutenant Bennett had written. Panic bred panic. ★

CHUCK LYONS is a retired newspaper editor and a freelance writer who has written many history articles for national and international periodicals. He lives in Rochester, New York.



Daylight showed that the casualties and damage of the “air raid” were caused by accidents, panic—and shrapnel from friendly fire. This LA resident points out holes in his car caused by a shell that exploded near his garage.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



the mad gasser of mattoon

**Temporary paralysis,
tremors, nausea,
burning skin...**

Were the people of an Illinois town being attacked with poison gas?

by Chuck Lyons



the mad gasser of mattoon by Chuck Lyons



SOMETHING STRANGE WAS GOING ON IN MATTOON, ILLINOIS, IN 1944. Beginning in the late summer, a number of residents started reporting unusual health complaints. Some were temporarily paralyzed. Others suffered sudden bouts of illness. Still others felt a burning sensation around the mouth and nose. The cause? Poison gas. At least that was the consensus among the townsfolk. The media blamed “the Mad Gasser of Mattoon.”

Police investigated the incidents of suspected gassing, but could never identify a Mad Gasser. Some authorities questioned whether there *was* a gasser. But the local residents had no doubt. Mattoon, one investigator wrote, became “a town on the edge of panic.” Rural families moved in with friends in town, and children weren’t allowed out after dark.

Over the years, theorists have proposed various scenarios to explain what happened in Mattoon. In 2003, one local writer went so far as to name a specific resident as the Mad Gasser. Could one of these theories be right? Or was it all just a case of mass hysteria, as some experts insist?

Strange Odors, Sickness, and Paralysis

MATTOON IS A TOWN in east-central Illinois. The 1940 census counted 15,827 residents. Four years later, one of those residents became the first to experience a suspected gas attack. During the overnight hours of August 31, 1944, into September 1, Urban Raef, who lived in the northwest part of town, noticed a strange odor in his bedroom. He felt sick to his stomach and vomited. He woke his wife, who thought the problem might be natural gas leaking from a blown-out pilot in the house. When she tried to get out of bed to check the pilot light, however, she was unable to get

up. Later that same night, a young mother who lived close by the Raefs was awakened by the sound of her daughter coughing but, like Mrs. Raef, found herself unable to leave her bed. A third woman reported similar symptoms that night.

The following night, another incident occurred. Aline Kearney,

a young housewife, was in bed reading the newspaper at 11 P.M. on September 1 when she noticed a strong, sweet odor seeping into the room. “At the time I thought it might be from flowers outside the window,” she said. “But the odor grew stronger, and I began to feel a paralysis of my legs and lower body. I got frightened and screamed.”

Kearney’s sister, who was in the house at the time, heard the scream and came to see what was the matter.

She, too, noticed the odor. The two women determined it was coming from an open bedroom window.

When Kearney’s cab-driver husband returned from work about 12:30 A.M., he spotted a prowler outside the house and gave chase but was unable to catch him. He later described the prowler as a tall man wearing dark clothing and a tight fitting cap.

These incidents made page one of the Mattoon *Daily Journal-Gazette*’s September 2 edition under the banner headline “Anesthetic Prowler on Loose.” A subhead announced “Mrs. Kearney and Daughter First Victims; Both Recover; Robber Fails to



Previous spread: It was every soldier’s terror in World War I: poison gas! WWII GIs prepared to face it, too, as this gas-masked sergeant is doing at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in 1942. But the people of Mattoon, Illinois, never dreamed they’d witness its horrors—until the Mad Gasser struck. Top: Mattoon was a pleasant town with its own postcard. Above: By September 1944, however, terrifying stories in the town’s *Daily Journal-Gazette* sparked panic. Opposite: A shadowy miscreant was spraying toxins into local homes, perhaps using a bug-killing flit gun.

Get into Home.” Upon seeing the coverage of the Kearney incident, the Raefs and the two other women victims also came forward.

Hunting for a Gasser— or an Explanation

ADDITIONAL ATTACKS followed—two more on September 5, seven on the 6th, one on the 7th, another on the 8th, two on the 9th, three on the 10th, and one, the last reported attack, on September 13. In one of those incidents, an 11-year-old girl was found unconscious in her bedroom. In another, the gasser was spotted and described as being a woman dressed as a man. In yet another, the gasser was seen carrying a flit gun, a hand-pumped sprayer used to dispense pesticide. Police began to receive numerous calls of footprints under bedroom windows (including some women’s prints), of tears in window screens, of mysterious blue vapors and buzzing sounds. The town’s 10-man police force was put on 24-hour alert, and the Illinois State Police and even the FBI became involved.

The first hard evidence emerged on September 5. That night, Carl and Beulah Cordes returned home around 10 P.M. and found a piece of white cloth slightly larger than a man’s handkerchief on their porch. Mrs. Cordes picked up the cloth and smelled it and became violently ill. She described the effect as being similar to an electric shock. “It was a feeling of paralysis,” she said, “My husband had to help me into the house and soon my lips were swollen and the roof of my mouth and my throat burned. I began to spit blood and my husband called a physician. It was more than two hours before I began to feel normal again.” Police speculated that the cloth might have been left on the porch by the gasser to knock out the family dog. A skeleton key and a large, almost empty tube of lipstick were also found on the sidewalk in front of the house.

The cloth was analyzed, but authorities said they found no chemicals on it that could explain Mrs. Cordes’s reaction. Had Mrs. Cordes simply gotten hysterical over the errant piece of cloth, as some suggested? Still, where had the cloth come from?

Panic was beginning to set in. “People were just scared pea-green,” Virginia Dodson, who lived in Mattoon in 1944,

later said. “It was strange. If you went to town at the time you saw people putting up their storm windows—and the weather was warm.”

What was happening in Mattoon was picked up by newspapers across the country, one of which even suggested that the Nazis might be employing poison gas against US civilians. Other stories proliferated: the gasser was a mental patient, an inventor testing a new discovery, kids pulling off a prank, or even an ape-man, a theory that came

from a long history of reported Bigfoot-like sightings in central Illinois.

Mattoon police had simpler ideas. In the beginning, they theorized the attacks might have been connected with robbery attempts. The Kearneys, for example, were believed to keep large sums of money in their home. That idea was soon abandoned, however, and police shifted their focus to another possibility: industrial pollution.

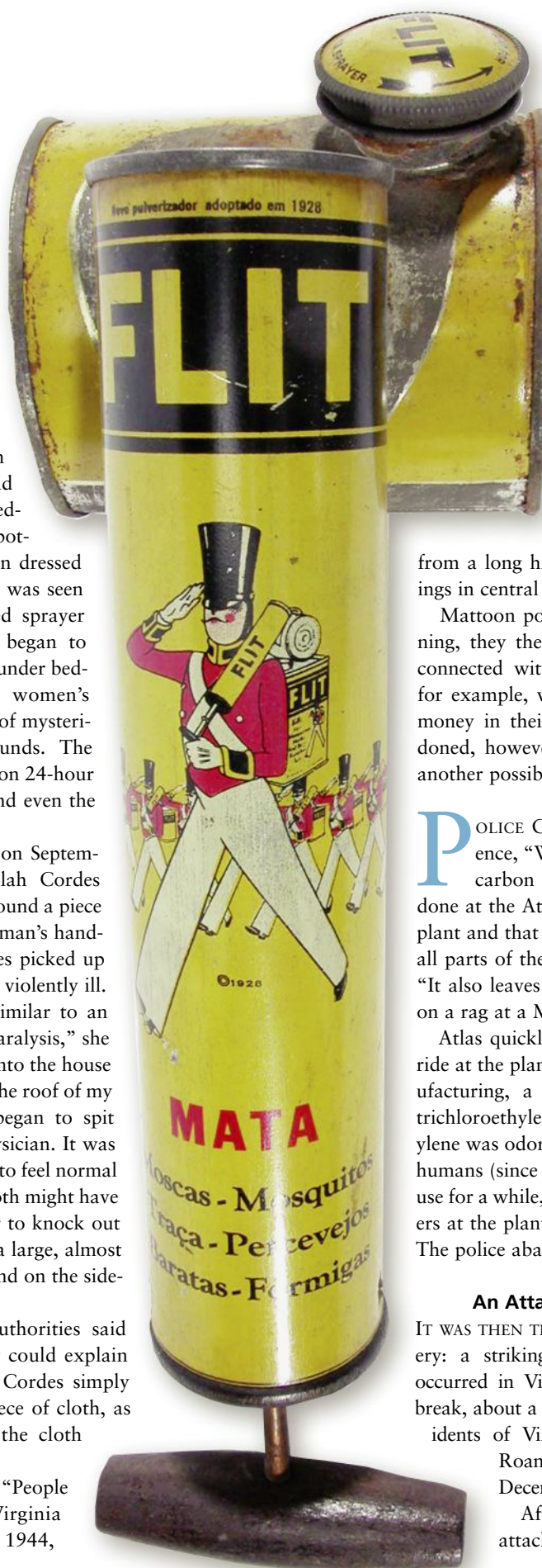
POLICE CHIEF C.E. COLE told a press conference, “We have found that large quantities of carbon tetrachloride are used in war work done at the Atlas Imperial Diesel Engine Company plant and that it is an odor which can be carried to all parts of the city as the wind shifts.” He added, “It also leaves stains on cloth such as those found on a rag at a Mattoon home.”

Atlas quickly responded that the only tetrachloride at the plant was in fire extinguishers. For manufacturing, a spokesman said, the factory used trichloroethylene gas. He claimed that trichloroethylene was odorless and did not produce ill effects in humans (since disproved, of course). It had been in use for a while, he said, and no one, including workers at the plant, had reported any ill effects before. The police abandoned that theory and moved on.

An Attack of the Past—Connected?

IT WAS THEN THAT POLICE MADE a surprising discovery: a strikingly similar series of incidents had occurred in Virginia a decade earlier. In that outbreak, about a dozen incidents were reported by residents of Virginia’s Botetourt County, north of Roanoke. The attacks occurred between December 22, 1933, and February 2, 1934.

After at least three of the Virginia attacks, a woman’s footprint was reported



the mad gasser of mattoon by Chuck Lyons

edly found beneath the window through which the gas was believed to have been sprayed. After the last attack, discolored snow was discovered near the victim's house. The snow had a sweet odor, and analysis showed it to contain sulfur, arsenic, and mineral oil. Authorities speculated that it might be insecticide residue.

In others of the incidents in Virginia, victims reported hearing voices outside the windows that they believed were later used to spray in gas. There were also reports of cars driving back and forth in front of homes that were later attacked. In Virginia, as would happen later in Mattoon, panic infected the community. Families in isolated areas moved in with friends in more settled areas, men began patrolling at night armed with shotguns and rifles, and the local *Roanoke Times* newspaper pleaded for calm.

ON JANUARY 25, 1934, around 9 P.M., a dog at the Virginia home of Chester Snyder began barking. Snyder jumped out of bed and grabbed his shotgun. Darting outside, he ran across the yard and fired a shot at a man he saw creeping along a ditch about 20 feet from the house. The shot missed, and Snyder ran back inside for more ammunition. By the time he returned, the man was gone. In at least two other instances, shots were fired at prowlers.

As in Mattoon, the cause of the Virginia attacks was never uncovered. Confronted with such similarities, police wondered if the two outbreaks were connected. Was the same person behind both? Or was the Mattoon

outbreak a copycat crime? Again no conclusions were reached.

Mass Hysteria and a Vengeful Outcast

LOCAL OFFICIALS BEGAN TO FOCUS on the more likely idea of an individual perpetrator coupled with mass hysteria.

Thomas V. Wright, local commissioner of public health, announced in 1944 that "there is no doubt that a gas maniac exists and has made a number of attacks. But many of the reported attacks are nothing more than hysteria. Fear of the gas man is entirely out of proportion to the menace of the relatively harmless gas he is spraying. The whole town is sick with hysteria."

After Wright's statement and after other authorities announced their belief that many of the incidents were based on hysteria, the number of reported gasser incidents dropped substantially.

The mass hysteria theory has gained ground through the years and is now generally accepted as the cause of what happened in Mattoon. A 1945 article in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* explored the Mad Gasser of Mattoon as a study in mass hysteria. Several years after the incidents, critics blamed the Mattoon newspaper for most of the incidents, charging that it all but created the Mattoon panic by its inflammatory coverage.

But even Commissioner Wright had been unwilling to dismiss all of the Mattoon attacks as hysteria. Picking up on that theme, in 2003 a local man wrote a self-published book about what happened in Mattoon in 1944, suggesting a solution and even naming a pos-



WOLFGANG SCHÄRER

gassers and ghosts

THE VIRGINIA gas attack reports of 1933–34 may not have been the only incidents similar to what happened in Mattoon. Loren Coleman, author of *Mysterious America: The Revised Edition* (2001), has investigated and written about Mattoon's Mad Gasser as well as other unexplained phenomena. He discovered what he calls "the Midwest's precursor to the Mad Gasser of Mattoon": the Ghost of Paris.

The ghost, says Coleman, began appearing shortly after the American Civil War and resurfaced off and on over the next 70 years, terrorizing the small town of Paris, Missouri, northwest of St. Louis. A number of people claimed to have seen the ghost and described him or her as tall, dressed in black, and car-



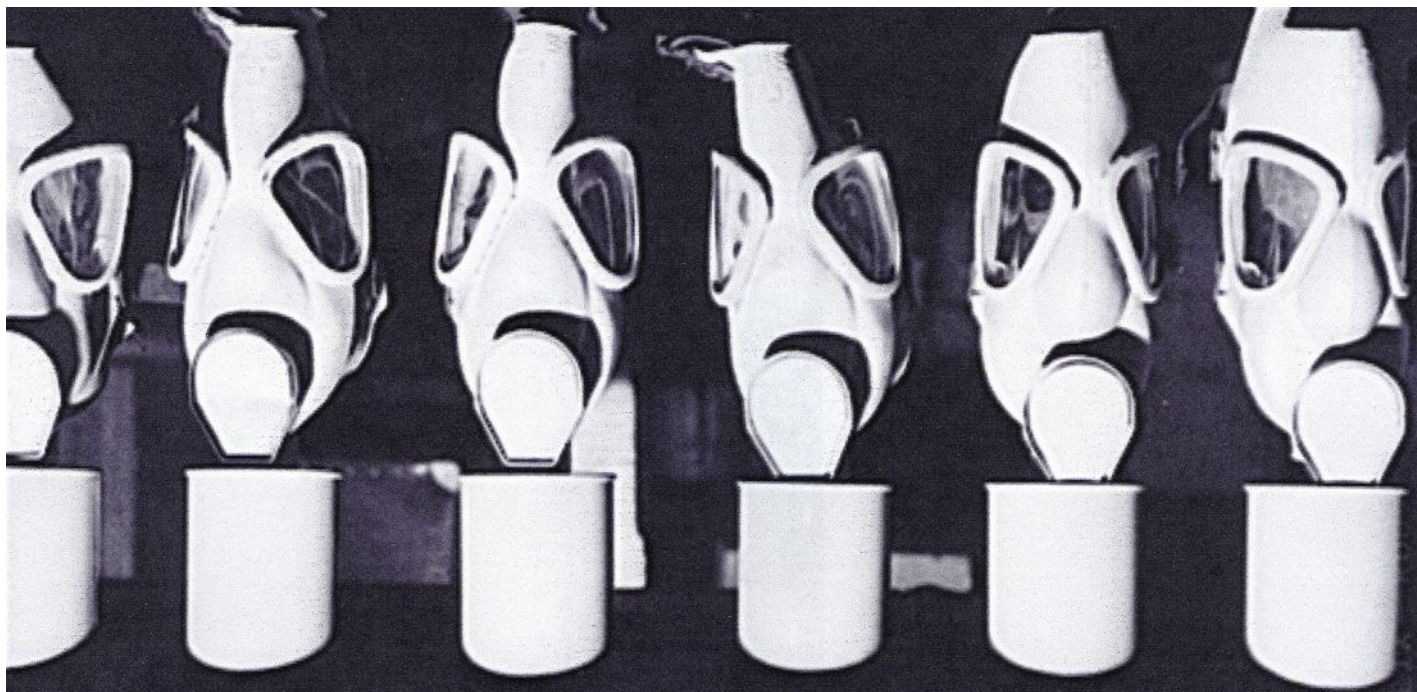
A smokescreen stands in for poison gas during US Army infantry training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in September 1942.

rying some type of wand. Local tradition said the ghost appeared every October and then randomly until spring, when the sightings stopped.

Coleman also mentions two other incidents that may be connected to what happened in Mattoon. In February 1944, he wrote, three people in southeastern Pennsylvania died after coming into contact with what was described as "a sweet-smelling gas." He also reports that in December 1961 a "sweet-smelling gas" was detected during a Christmas program at a Houston Baptist church. The church's congregation rushed outside into the fresh air, but not all of them were quick enough. Eight people, mostly children, were admitted to a local hospital.

Pennsylvania's and Texas's poison perfumers remained at large, like the other ghostly gassers.

CHUCK LYONS



Opposite: Could industrial fumes have caused the symptoms Mattoon residents felt? Police said Atlas Imperial Diesel Engine Company gave off carbon tetrachloride. But the plant's only tetrachloride was in fire extinguishers like this one. Above: Perhaps an Axis saboteur was to blame. The possibility of gas attacks had crossed the government's mind; these masks at a Maryland arsenal were for civilian use.

sible perpetrator. In his book *The Mad Gasser of Mattoon*, chemistry and physics teacher Scott Maruna pointed to a local man named Farley Llewellyn as the attacker, a man he labeled as “mentally-disturbed.” Llewellyn, wrote Maruna, was the son of a prominent Mattoon grocer and at the time of the attacks was a chemistry student at the University of Illinois. Isolated from the local community because of suspicions that he was a homosexual, Llewellyn was “an outcast and recluse” who never “fit in,” Maruna claimed.

“When I spoke with people who knew him..., the same words would keep coming up over and over again—‘odd,’ ‘different,’ ‘recluse,’ ‘loner,’” Maruna told the *Journal Gazette* in 2005. “Although he was highly intelligent and excelled in school, no one ever really understood him.”

The attacks, Maruna said, were based on Llewellyn’s desire for revenge against the town that he felt had rejected him. Maruna points out that many of the attacks were clustered around Llewellyn’s home and that the first victims had actually attended high school with Llewellyn. Maruna also claims that Llewellyn’s two sisters, Florence and Kathryn, were involved (explaining the women’s footprints) and that they had carried out one or more of the attacks in order to draw suspicion away from their brother.

Case (Not) Closed

ANOTHER, EVEN SIMPLER, EXPLANATION has also been suggested. In 2005 Marge Maxey, a Mattoon resident who was working as

a secretary in the Coles County State’s Attorney office in 1944 suggested that she knew what had caused the whole string of incidents. “My boss (State’s Attorney W.K. Kidwell) said a woman had gambled away her husband’s paycheck and didn’t want him to know it,” she said. “So she made up something about being gassed and said the money was stolen. That started the thing going.” Maxey did not identify the woman.

Today, the mass hysteria theory is the most widely accepted explanation of the Mattoon incidents. In fact, psychologists are widely conversant with what happened in the Illinois town and refer to the Mad Gasser events as a textbook case of mass hysteria. “The best evidence for the hysteria hypothesis is the nature of the symptoms and the fact that those cases seen by physicians—though there were only four—were diagnosed as hysteria,” writes University of Illinois psychologist Donald M. Johnson, who studied the Mattoon incidents. “All symptoms reported are common in hysteria. The hypothesis accounts

for the rapid recovery of all victims and the lack of aftereffects.”

But not everyone would agree. “No one cared what the police said,” Beulah Cordes, the woman who had found the cloth on her porch, said in 1958. “We knew it was true about the madman. The mothers wouldn’t let their children out of the house and nobody went uptown. We weren’t taking any chances.” ★

CHUCK LYONS writes frequently for America in WWII about odd occurrences on the WWII US home front.

MATTOON PUBLIC LIBRARY, LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

To All Citizens of Mattoon

Asking the co-operation of the public in the “mad anesthetic” case, Commissioner Thomas V. Wright and Chief of Police C. E. Cole today issued the following statement:

“We want the public to know that everything possible is being done in this case, and we are grateful for the confidence of a majority of the citizens. However, we have a few points on which we hope to get 100 per cent co-operation, beginning tonight. They are:

“1.—Stay off the streets in residential districts unless your business requires you to be there. There is no danger in the business districts.

“2.—Roving bands of men and boys should disband. They are in grave danger of being shot by some frightened property owner.

“3.—Put away the guns now in the hands of individuals, because some innocent person may get killed. The only time one should shoot is upon seeing a man peering into a window of one’s home. Then extreme care should be used.

“4.—Don’t follow the police car when it is speeding in answer to a call. Persons who persist in doing this will be arrested.”

A notice in Mattoon’s paper reveals the extent of local panic, asking “roving bands of men and boys” to disband and urging people to put away guns.



ODDITIES



americans for HITLER

On the eve of World War II, the German American Bund insisted the Nazi salute was as American as apple pie.

by Mark D. Van Ells

JESUS CHRIST AND ADOLF HITLER. Only a Nazi would have dared to compare. “Hitler is the friend of Germans everywhere,” one girl in a Nazi youth camp remembered being told, “and just as Christ wanted little children to come to him, Hitler wants German children to revere him.” The comment may hardly sound shocking, considering the Nazi mindset, but the girl who heard it wasn’t in Düsseldorf or Stuttgart or Berlin. She was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the heartland of America, American children were being indoctrinated into Nazism as the Nazis prepared to take over Europe.

The youth camps were run by an organization of German immigrants in the United States to cultivate a loyal Nazi following in their adopted homeland. All but forgotten today, the group known as the German American Bund (*bund* is German for “alliance”) was one of the most controversial political groups of the politically uncertain 1930s. Nazi ideology taught that all Germans were united by blood and that the descendants of German emigrants around the world needed to be awakened to their racial duties in support of Hitler. The United States, 25 percent of whose population traced ancestry back to Germany, was a tempting target for Nazi recruiters. Forty-three percent of the population of Wisconsin, a state noted for its beer and bratwurst, was either German-born or first-generation German American in 1939. Nazis believed those German Americans could be awakened to their cause.

World War I had been traumatic for Germans on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, a wave of anti-German hysteria had swept through the nation. Fear spurred by government propaganda led some to attack what they believed was the enemy in their midst, even though there was little evidence to justify their fears. So-called superpatriots maligned German culture. Some localities banned German music and instruction in the German language. Sauerkraut became “liberty cabbage.” There were reports of dachshunds being attacked, and German-language books being hauled out of libraries and burned in the street. Some Germans endured humiliations such as

being forced to kiss the American flag in public, being spied upon by their neighbors, and in some cases even being attacked. In Illinois, one German immigrant was killed by a mob. Many German Americans hid their ethnic identity. What remained of the public German-American community grew insular, defensive, and wary of outsiders.

After the war, another wave of German immigrants came to America. Most assimilated successfully, but some did not.

These maladjusted new arrivals were German fascists, described by historian Sander Diamond as “self-proclaimed émigrés” who feared “proletarianization” in Germany’s unstable new democracy. They had experienced the humiliation of Germany’s wartime defeat and occupation, and the social and political chaos that reigned there afterward. Many were young, middle-class professionals, and some had participated in street fighting against socialists and communists. Once in America, these fascists formed political groups like the Teutonia Association, founded in Detroit in 1924.

Just four months after Hitler came to power in January 1933, Nazi groups in the United States merged to form the Friends of the New Germany. The involvement of German nationals in the organization caused friction between Berlin and Washington, so in 1936 it was reorganized as the German American Bund and was to consist only of American citizens of German descent. Headquartered in New York, the Bund was led by Fritz Kuhn, a chemical engineer from Munich who had served in the German



Children offer a Nazi salute at the gate of Camp Siegfried in 1937—not in Germany, but in Yaphank, Long Island, New York (opposite).
The German American Bund, whose emblem appears on the Brooklyn-made pin above, ran the camp.

LEFT: COURTESY OF JAMIE CROSS MUIRMAN, WWW.THIRDREICHMEDALS.COM; RIGHT: USC LIBRARIES REGIONAL HISTORY COLLECTION, DEPT. OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



army during the war. Dubbed the “American fuehrer” in the press, he arrived in America in 1928, settling first in Detroit and then in New York. He became a citizen in 1934.

Not officially part of the Nazi party, the Bund behaved as if it were. It operated on the Nazi leadership principle, which demanded absolute obedience to superiors. Like Germany’s Nazi party, the American Bund divided its territory—the United States—into regional districts, and created a youth program and a paramilitary Order Division. Members donned uniforms with brown shirts and jack boots eerily like those of Germany’s Nazis. Despite their foreign appearance, members considered themselves to be loyal, patriotic Americans who were strengthening their adopted homeland, protecting it from Jewish-communist plots and black cultural influences such as jazz music. The Midwestern regional leader George Froboese of Milwaukee described the Bund as “the German element which is in touch with its race but owes its first duty to America.” To avoid another clash between Germany and America, it urged US neutrality in European affairs.

THE BUND MADE FAR MORE ENEMIES than friends in the United States. Socialists and communists immediately opposed it. So did Jewish Americans, who organized a boycott of products from Nazi Germany (the Bund, in turn, organized a boycott of Jewish merchants and harassed Jewish and communist groups). In Wash-

ington, Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York began an investigation of Nazism in America. The Bund also attracted the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The German-American reaction to Hitler and the Bund was mixed. Most supported American neutrality, and many were glad to see the revival of Germany and were angry about the Jewish boycott of German goods. But they were also uneasy about Hitler. Some tried to be cautiously optimistic. The Milwaukee *Sonntagspost* argued in 1933, for example, that “the Hitler dictatorship represents for the moment the most efficient and expedient concentration of the united will of the German nation.” Any hopes German Americans may have placed in Hitler would soon be dashed. Nazi behavior overseas and the presence of the Bund in America would soon revive German Americans’ deepest fear: a repeat of World War I’s anti-German hysteria.

The Bund used several methods to try to awaken German Americans to Nazism. One was to infiltrate existing German ethnic clubs. The Bund hoped to Nazify German-American cultural life as Hitler had done under his policy of “political coordination.” The infiltration instead tore German-American communities apart. The Bund then tried to take control through intimidation. When the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies voted to ban displays of the swastika at cultural events in 1935, for example, Bund members threatened anti-Nazi dele-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES





gates. The meeting became so heated that the police were called to restore order. Bund harassment of anti-Nazi Germans continued, and the Wisconsin federation president once received an anonymous letter saying "It is a very poor bird that dirties its own nest."

One way the Bund promoted its cause was by sponsoring meetings and rallies, well-publicized events in which leaders outlined Nazi ideology and members distributed propaganda. Uniformed members gave the Nazi salute and shouted "Heil Hitler" as the Order Division kept a stern watch over the proceedings. There was fiery rhetoric aimed at Jews, communists, and certain politicians. Bund leaders lambasted President Franklin Roosevelt, calling him "Franklin Rosenfeld" and criticizing his "Jew Deal" social programs.

The Bund took care to display patriotism for America during its gatherings. George Washington's birthday was a common occasion for Bund rallies. On stage, the American flag and portraits of Washington appeared side by side with the swastika. Both countries' national anthems were played.

Bund rallies frequently became public spectacles. Protesters were a common sight, sometimes appearing in numbers comparable to the Bund members in attendance. Violence seemed all but inevitable. In Milwaukee in 1938, riots broke out at two separate Bund rallies. "Hecklers arose to break up the meeting," the *Milwaukee Journal* reported of a Washington's birthday rally in February. "The order division went to work, gloved fists flying." One heckler lost several teeth in the melee. A month later, violence erupted again when a communist rushed the stage during a rally, enraged by the sight of children in Nazi youth uniforms.

Children were an important part of the Bund. Members sent



their children to places such as

Camp Hindenburg in Wisconsin each summer to participate in a youth program the Bund compared to boy and girl scouting. The camps were also gathering places for adult activities—everything from picnics to rallies. At these camps, children dressed in Nazi uniforms and drilled military-style, with marching, inspections, and flag-raising ceremonies. Although the Bund denied it, children were taught Nazi ideology.

The rise of the Bund stimulated considerable discussion in America. A few homegrown racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Christian Enforcers, and the Silver Shirts (who sniped that democracy was "strictly kosher") found common ground with the anti-Semitic, white-supremacist Bund. Most Americans, however, objected to the Bund's racist and undemocratic ideology, and the fact that the Bund rose to prominence just as Hitler began expanding German control in Europe raised other concerns. The Bund seemed to most Americans like a dangerous foreign element, perhaps a secret Nazi fifth column in the United States. By 1938, the anti-fascist movement broadened to encompass a diverse coalition ranging from communists to veterans groups.

The Bund insisted it was pro-American, wedding its Nazi symbols to the US flag (above) and staging events like this 1939 Washington's birthday rally in New York's Madison Square Garden (opposite). But the Bund's principles were as alien as its Nazi uniforms (top left, Camp Deutschhorst, Sellersville, Pennsylvania, 1937) and the salute it shared with German Nazis (top right, at the German Railway Office, New York City).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

German Americans were torn. Some German clubs had spoken out against the Bund early on, but others resisted public criticism of the organization, fearing that a divided German community would be subject to further cultural erosion. But by 1938, anti-Bund sentiment had grown so strong that German-American leaders concluded they either had to dissociate themselves completely from the Bund or run the risk of being branded Nazis themselves. In 1938, the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies issued a statement declaring it had “nothing whatsoever to do with the propaganda of racial hatred and religious intolerance fostered by the Volksbund [literally, the people’s alliance—the German American Bund].” The federation claimed that the average German American was “strongly opposed to the Nazi doctrines of hate” and pleaded “America, please take notice!”

The Wisconsin federation backed up its words with action. In 1939, with the help of some in the business community, it acquired the lease to Camp Hindenburg, renaming it Camp Carl Schurz in honor of the 19th-century German-American political leader and turning it into its own youth camp. Federation president Bernhard Hofmann stated that children would be instructed there in Americanism and that there would be “no flag but the stars and stripes.” Froboese claimed the site had been “stolen,” stating “I am glad they had the decency to abandon the name Camp Hindenburg.” The Bund meanwhile obtained another site, just a mile to the south. These and other rival German-American camps operated around Milwaukee for several years.

As the 1930s came to a close, various problems had begun to take a serious toll on the Bund. The Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939 took the fire from the Bund’s anti-communist rhetoric. By

the end of the year, Kuhn had been jailed for illegal use of organizational funds. Protests against the Bund continued as well, including the bombing of its Chicago offices in July 1940. The Bund developed a bunker mentality, holding its 1940 national convention secretly among three Midwestern camps. Although the Bund continued to speak out against the Jewish boycott and the “torries and internationalists” trying to provoke war with Germany, press coverage of the Bund tapered off as the group declined and public fear of domestic Nazism waned. Hundreds of dispirited Bund members returned to Germany.

WHEN HITLER DECLARED WAR against the United States four days after Japan’s December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, Bund members found themselves stranded in enemy territory. Federal agents seized Bund records. Many of its members faced denaturalization proceedings and imprisonment. In a letter to the Bund’s lawyer, Froboese, who had risen from Midwestern regional leader to become the Bund’s national leader just weeks earlier, offered his assessment of the organization’s brief but tumultuous existence:

True it is that we made mistakes especially in the field of what you call “mental psychology.” Still, I would like to again emphasize, that I never looked upon the [Bund] as an offensive organization. From the beginning it was a defensive movement. We have never been a cause, but instead have always been a reaction to a cause.... We always stood with both feet on American soil and in the final analysis of all of our doings, had only the very interests of this our America at heart.

In 1942 Froboese was issued a subpoena to testify before a New

American Jews battled Hitler, launching a national boycott of German imports (above, left) and warning Jews and others about Nazism—even through plays, like this one advertised in English and Yiddish (above, right). Able to silence hecklers with its Order Division enforcers (two flank the speaker at this 1937 meeting in New York City), the Bund couldn’t win support for a boycott of Jewish businesses.



York grand jury concerning Bund activities. En route to New York, he got off the train in Waterloo, Indiana, and committed suicide by laying his head on the tracks in front of an oncoming train.

German Americans continued to emphasize their Americanism after the Pearl Harbor raid. "We appeal to the public not to think that everything German must be Nazi," declared the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies. "We are not covering any aliens...[and] will not stand for anything that is against this country." In New York the Loyal Americans of German Descent claimed that World War II "throws a searchlight" on German Americans and that "failure to distinguish between loyal Americans and Nazi sympathizers can create disaster." In 1942 *American Legion* magazine featured the article "I Killed Americans in 1918, but Now I Fight for America." The author called his US citizenship oath "sacred" and stated that immigrants such as he "must rally in defense of honor, family, and German-America." Indeed, many German Americans served, fought, and died in defense of the United States during the war.

The emphasis on Americanism paid off, and a revival of anti-German hysteria did not occur. There were some unfortunate incidents of violence and prejudice against Germans during World War II, but they were not widespread. The extent of the government's internment of German Americans during the war is hotly debated among scholars, but it was indisputably small in compar-

ison to the internment of Japanese Americans. Most Americans seemed to make a distinction between what they believed were good Germans and bad Germans, and America became a refuge for many German intellectuals fleeing Nazi rule. In the Pacific, one of the troops' favorite generals was German-born Walter Krueger, commander of the US Sixth Army. Actress and USO entertainer Marlene Dietrich, also born in Germany, was even more popular with the average GI than Krueger.

For all its prominence and bluster, the Bund involved only a small portion of the German-American community. Precise membership figures are not known. Estimates range from as high as 25,000 to as low as 6,000. Historians agree that about 90 percent of Bund members were immigrants who arrived in America after 1919. In Wisconsin, the most heavily German state, the Bund seems to have mustered barely 500 members, which would rule out the possibility of anywhere near 25,000 members nationwide.

Ironically, the Bund's goal of awakening Germans in America actually weakened German culture where it had once thrived. The Holocaust, the lack of new immigrants after the war, and suburbanization hurt, but the mere existence of the Bund had forced many German Americans to emphasize the American part of their identities and sacrifice the German. ★

MARK D. VAN ELLS is a professor of history at the City University of New York.

The Human Lightning Rod

by Carl Zebrowski

ROY SULLIVAN WAS A TARGET. That gave this National Park Service ranger something in common with the men who filled US military ranks and held the front in World War II while Germans, Italians, and Japanese shot at them. The potentially lethal force that was gunning for Sullivan, however, wasn't man-made. It was lightning, and it found him early in life and kept coming back. *Guinness Book of World Records* investigators ruled that he was struck a record seven different times.

Born on February 7, 1912, Sullivan grew up the 4th of 11 kids on a family farm in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. It was the sort of area where a few dozen kids from a dozen families attended classes in a one-room schoolhouse. Sullivan would never stray too far from this relatively safe and predictable place. One day, the young Sullivan was working in the field when a lightning bolt hit the blade of his scythe. It set some wheat on fire, but he walked away unharmed. No one else saw it happen, and there was no medical visit, so the people at Guinness didn't count it.

In his early twenties, Sullivan took a job practically in his backyard at Shenandoah National Park. Working for the Civilian Conservation Corps, he helped build the brand-new park's soon-to-be famous Skyline Drive that stretched for 105 miles along the mountain ridge. In 1936 he became a park ranger, and in 1940 he was put on fire patrol.

After the war came to America and changed daily life, park visitation plummeted. Picnic areas, concession stands, guest lodges, and campgrounds closed down while locals were off fighting overseas or busy with home-front war work. Gasoline and tire rationing all but eliminated tourism. But the threat of forest fires didn't disappear just because the visitors did. Ever since the Great Fire of 1910 burned down three million acres in Idaho and Montana and killed 87 people, the US Forest Service had rules in place for monitoring wooded land to make sure flash fires couldn't raze tens of thousands of trees before anyone even noticed. Park rangers and other workers kept constant watch for blazes that could burn out of control.

One day in April 1942, Sullivan was taking in the panoramic view of the park's Page Valley from a just-built fire tower as a storm gathered. Things turned violent quickly. Next thing he knew, bright flashes right before his eyes reminded him that the new structure didn't have a lightning rod yet. "It was hit seven or eight times, and fire was jumping all over the place," he later recalled. He made a snap decision to bail out. "I got just a few feet away from the tower and then, blam! It burned a half-inch strip all the way down my right leg and knocked my big toe off," he said. "My boot was full of blood, and it ran through the hole in my sole."

For most men Sullivan's age who went to war and got shot at, their time as human targets ended by August 1945. Sullivan's had just begun. He was struck six more times through 1977. He lost eyebrows and eyelashes, was knocked out, and accumulated a collection of scars. All seven strikes were documented right afterward by park superintendent R. Taylor Hoskins and by doctors. "I have never been a fearful man. But I have to tell you the truth," Sullivan said later, sounding like a traumatized combat veteran. "When I hear thunder now, I feel a little shaky."

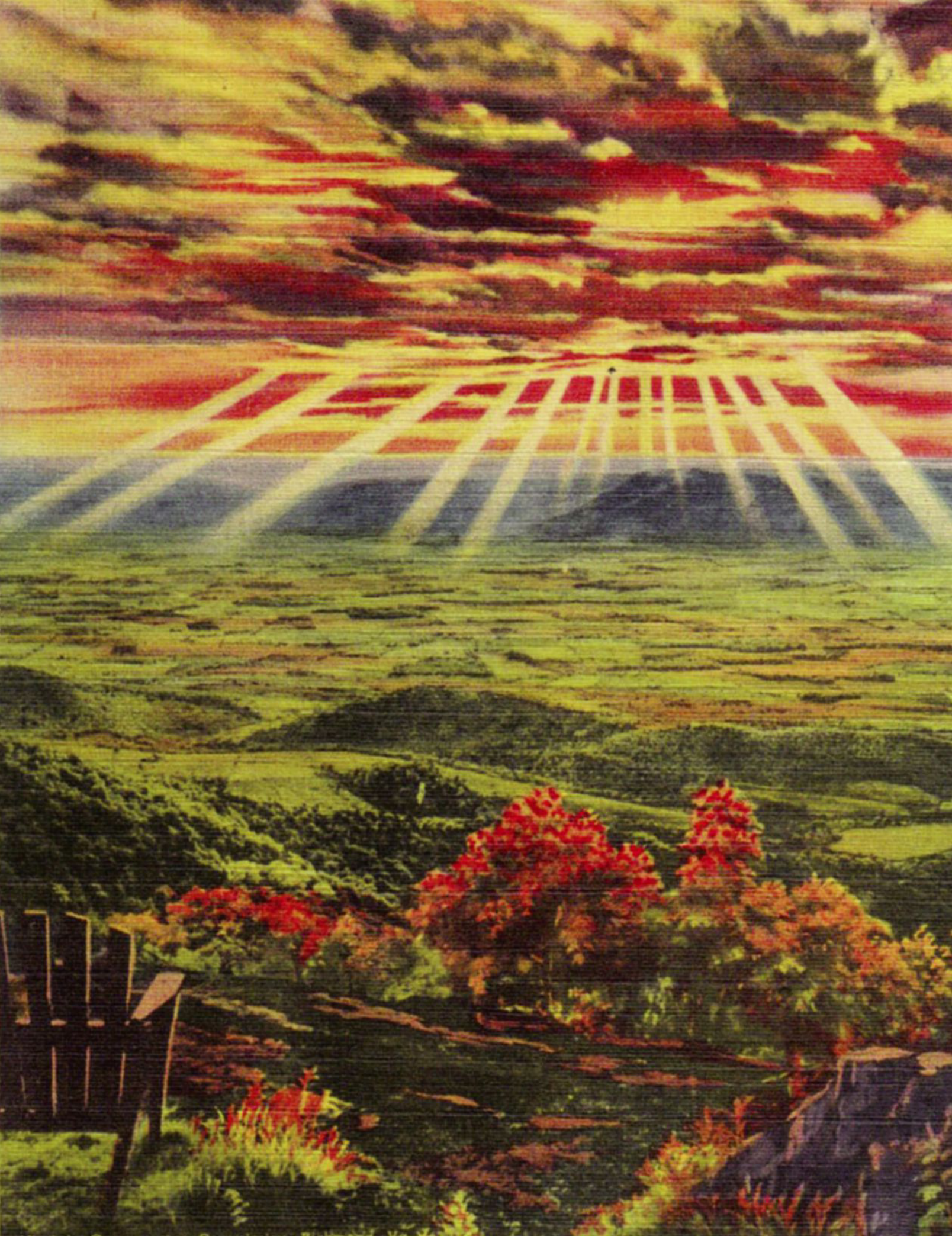
Unlike in combat, no one was ever on the scene to witness the hits Sullivan took. Skeptics, including some of his relatives, later questioned whether it was all just a long, drawn-out tall tale. "He loved telling a story," said William Nichols, a supervisor of Sullivan's at the park. "In a word, he was a character."

Sullivan suffered no known lasting damage from his legendary frequent rendezvous with lightning. But the *unknown*—possible psychological repercussions—might have had a role in his death. On the night of September 27–28, 1983, he got into bed with his wife (his fourth). "She was a very sound sleeper," said Randy Fisher, a sheriff who was dispatched to the house in the morning to find Sullivan lying there with a gunshot wound a few hours old. "The speculation on her part was that he'd been very depressed," Fisher said. "She woke up in bed, and he was dead." ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America in WWII*, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine's first issue.

A WWII-era postcard hints at the calming natural beauty of Virginia's Shenandoah National Park.
For park ranger Roy Sullivan, that beauty was shattered by lightning strikes—not once, but seven times, starting in 1942.

OPPOSITE: AMERICA IN WWII COLLECTION. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN AMERICA IN WWII, JUNE 2015





A Straight-Arm Salute To Old Glory

by Carl Zebrowski

THERE HE IS, the aviator and political activist Charles Lindbergh, standing in a crowd with his right arm straight out, palm down, doing what looks to be the “Heil Hitler” salute. Such photos don’t help refute charges that he had Nazi sympathies. Then there are the photos of young schoolkids doing the same salute. What is not immediately apparent in these scenes is that Lindbergh and the kids are saluting the flag, the *American flag*, in the United States.

Surprisingly, the salute associated with Hitler was essentially the same salute Americans gave the Stars and Stripes while reciting the Pledge of Allegiance back in those days. In fact, the salute and pledge were born together. In 1892, *Youth’s Companion*, the nation’s largest magazine for kids, was giving away flags with subscription packages as part of a “put a flag in every schoolhouse” drive. Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister and writer, was hired to bolster the effort, and he penned the pledge to be the centerpiece of school flag-raising ceremonies during the nationwide Columbus Day quadricentennial celebration. The pledge ran in the magazine’s September 8, 1892, issue along with instructions for reciting it:

...Every pupil gives the flag the military salute—right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it. Standing thus, all repeat together, slowly, “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.” At the words, “to my Flag,” the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, toward the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side. [A “to” was added before “the Republic” a few weeks later, and “under God” was added after “one Nation” in 1954.]

Over the years, the pledge gesture was simplified from what was originally described, eliminating the military-style salute at the start. And the palm was generally turned downward in the manner associated with the Roman salute common in the movies.

Even there, the story runs into complications. The Roman salute apparently does not begin with the Romans. Historians have argued that no salute of that style is described in any Roman writing, nor does it appear in Roman art. They claim that the neoclas-

sical French artist Jacques-Louis David introduced it in his late-18th-century paintings and others of his school picked up on it.

A century later, in 1899, Broadway staged the postbellum novel *Ben Hur*, set in ancient Rome, and the title character gave the salute when greeting a sheik. Later he was riding his chariot and a crowd greeted him in the same manner. Movie-makers retained the salute for the 1907 silver screen version.

When the Italian nationalist leader Gabriele d’Annunzio scripted the 1914 film *Cabiria*, he, too, had his ancient Roman characters give the Roman salute. Five years later, he brought the salute into the real world after he led 2,000 nationalists into Fiume when it was about to be handed over to the WWI Allies. He declared Fiume an independent state and declared war on Italy.

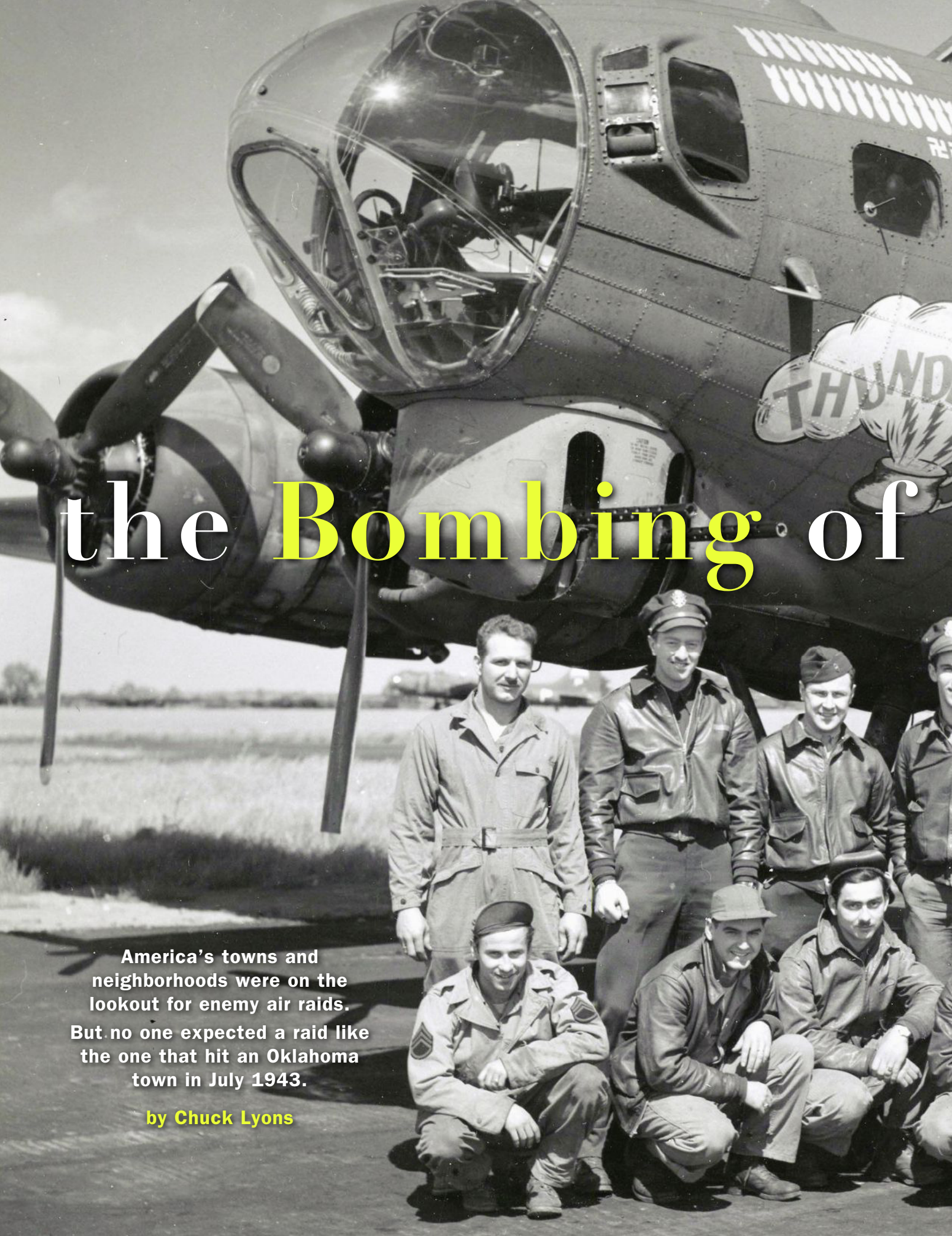
During his one-year stint as ruler that ended with bombardment by the Italian navy, d’Annunzio hit on a formula for dictators to come. He delivered speeches from balconies, co-opted religious symbols for political effect, harshly suppressed dissent—and popularized the Roman salute. Within a year of Benito Mussolini’s takeover of Italy in 1922, the salute became an official fascist gesture of greeting.

The Nazis picked up on the salute three years later, and after they rose to power in Germany in 1933, it became law. All employees of the state were to be saluted, and violators were punished. Images of Nazis doing the salute eventually appeared in American newspapers and magazines and in the weekly newsreels shown before movies. Once America was officially at war with Germany, the flag salute that was now so closely associated with the enemy had to go. In December 1942 Congress passed amendments to the code that guided flag display and other formalities, including one that stated the pledge “should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart.”

The extended-arm salute was gone for good in the United States. After the war, the salute was banished in Germany, too. Today, anyone caught making the “Heil Hitler” salute there can be punished with up to three years in prison. ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America* in WWII, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine’s first issue.

In May 1942, schoolkids in Southington, Connecticut, pledge allegiance to the flag with arms raised, like children nationwide. By year’s end the straight-arm salute, co-opted by the Nazis, vanished from US schools.



the Bombing of

America's towns and neighborhoods were on the lookout for enemy air raids. But no one expected a raid like the one that hit an Oklahoma town in July 1943.

by Chuck Lyons



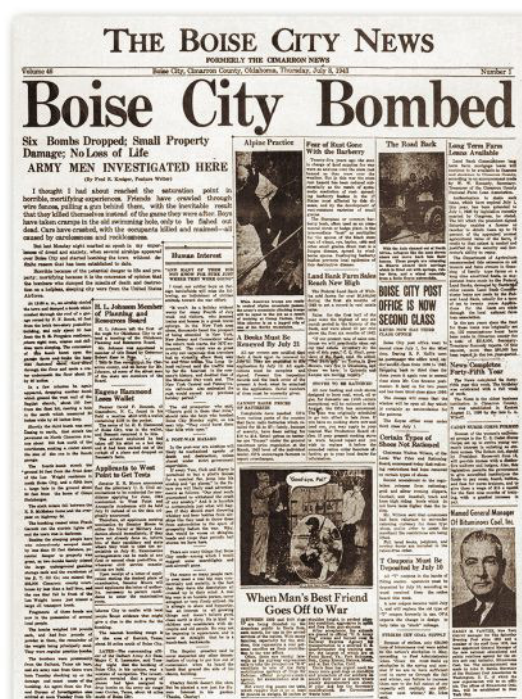
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Boise City



the Bombing of Boise City by Chuck Lyons



mOST OF THE LIGHTS IN BOISE CITY, OKLAHOMA, were out by midnight of July 5-6, 1943, like most nights. Only the four lights at the corners of the Cimarron County courthouse shone bright. The town was asleep and the buildings were quiet, except for a small café where some truck drivers sat drinking coffee. A few young couples were walking home from a late movie.

The quiet was shattered at 12:30 A.M., when a bomb crashed through the roof of a garage at the residence of Forrest Bourk and exploded. F.L. Bellew, a night watchman, dropped onto the sidewalk next to the post office and looked skyward. Fred Kreiger, the editor, printer, and ad salesman of the *Boise City News*, heard the explosion, jumped out of bed, put on a pair of slacks, and ran into the street. “My first thought was an enemy plane,” he said. “Then I thought, why in heck...?”

Up to this time, Boise (rhymes with voice) City was a nearly anonymous Oklahoma panhandle town of about 1,100 people. It was best known for its location on the Santa Fe Trail—and for Autograph Rock, a 200-foot-tall, 700-foot-wide slab of Dakota sandstone bearing the signatures of more than 300 19th-century pioneers; for a nearby cache of dinosaur fossils; and for legendary Indian-fighter Kit Carson, who built a fort near Autograph Rock. The bombing wiped out Boise City’s anonymity. Suddenly the tiny town in the former Indian Territory was poised to become famous as the only place in the continental United States to be bombed during World War II. But how, people wondered, could Japanese or German bombers make it all the way inland to Oklahoma unnoticed?

It all started early on July 5 with a seemingly innocuous common cold. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Assimotos, the navigator of *Thundermug*, a B-17 Flying Fortress emblazoned with a painting of a chamber pot spitting out bombs, was grounded at the US Army Air Forces base in Dalhart, Texas, due to illness. Another navigator was put in his place for a practice nighttime bombing run. *Thundermug* and a number of other bombers took off that night from Dalhart, some 50 miles south of Boise City. Their destination was a bombing range near Conlen, 30 miles to the northeast. The target was marked with a light at each of its four corners.

Somehow *Thundermug*’s replacement navigator got disoriented and steered the B-17 to Boise City, not Conlen. Shortly after midnight, the crew spotted four lights and began an approach. But the four lights did not mark the intended target. They marked the corners of the Cimarron County courthouse in Boise City. “Later we saw pictures of the night bombing range and the blacked out courthouse,” Assimotos said. “Nobody could tell the difference.”

When the bombs started falling, Colleen Jones, a soda jerk at Hall’s drugstore, was crossing the courthouse square with a date. “There were five of us girls with soldiers from Dalhart...,” she

Previous spread: The B-17 *Thundermug* (shown here with a crew in England in June 1944) left an ignominious history behind in Boise City, Oklahoma, which it accidentally attacked with practice bombs on July 5, 1943. Above: Never before or again during World War II would an American newspaper be justified in printing a screaming headline that its namesake city was bombed. Opposite: The 100-pound bombs that fell on Boise City were dummies, but the four pounds of explosive in one of them made a big enough crater at the First Baptist Church to swallow locals Norma Gene Butterbaugh (left) and Ellis Marie Adey up to their hips.



the Bombing of Boise City by Chuck Lyons

later said. “A bomb dropped. I asked a soldier what it was and he said, ‘By God, it’s bombs!’ We ran just as fast as we could.”

Outside the late-night café, two bombs hit the street, exploding dangerously close to a fuel tanker truck. The driver was among the truckers gathered in the cafe. He bolted from the building, hopped into his cab, and sped his rig out of town.

About the same time, the town’s air-raid warden, John Adkins, phoned the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Oklahoma with news of the bombing and calmly sent a wire to his adjutant general, reading “Boise City bombed, one A.M. Baptist Church, garage hit.” Frank Garrett, the city’s electrical man, jumped out of bed, pulled pants over his pajama bottoms, and ran to the Southwestern Public Service building, where he yanked down hard on the town’s master light switch, thrusting the town into complete darkness. The bombardier on *Thundermug*, William Bicker, assumed he had hit and taken out the control for the target range’s power box and called off the raid. The plane returned to Dalhart with four bombs left in her bay.

IN THE MORNING, Boise City residents assessed the bombing damage and found it minimal. Fortunately, the six bombs loosed on the town in the space of about half an hour were practice dummies with only 4 pounds of powdered explosive mixed with 96 pounds of sand to fill out each shell. Forrest Bourk’s garage had collapsed, but neighbors said it was already rickety and falling apart long before the bomb crashed through its roof and put a four-foot-deep hole in the ground. There were some broken stained-glass windows and battered white wood siding at the Baptist church and a few craters on Main Street.

Back at Dalhart Airbase, army air forces officials determined that it was *Thundermug*’s crew that had goofed. The men were bawled out and given the choice of heading for Europe to join the bombing of Germany or facing a court-martial. They chose the former. Later in the day, embarrassed air forces officials visited Boise City and tried sheepishly to explain what had happened as residents went around taking pictures of each other standing in the craters.

Local children made the best of the situation. “I was in the first grade when Boise City was bombed,” wrote Don Lee Rhudy. “[The] craters made great places to play. One was right behind our cow shed; another was in front of the movie theater. There was another one in the town square, but they wouldn’t let us play there.”

Adults pondered deeper issues. “If one-fourth of the people who came to see the hole the bomb made would only attend church...,” said Pastor R.D. Dodds as he surveyed the damage to his Baptist church building. Fred Kreiger offered a tongue-in-cheek conclusion in the *News*: “What this place needs are some searchlights and anti-aircraft guns.”

Exactly 50 years after the bombing, on July 5, 1993, a memorial was unveiled in Boise City. The memorial had been in the works, more or less, since the 1960s. It began in Colorado when retired air force captain James Force spotted a most unusual item in a junkyard. “I knew what it was,” he said. “It was a bomb. It had the fins on it and everything.” Force had served as a B-17 pilot during World War II and had flown 42 missions over Europe between November 1944 and March 1945, including missions during the February 1945 firebombing of Dresden. “I dropped many of those kinds of bombs on targets in Germany and that made it a relic for me.”

Force bought the empty bomb shell for \$10 with the idea to clean it up, paint it, and use it as part of a World War II monument he had been planning. But he never got around to doing anything with the casing, and it languished in his garage, covered with a blanket, for a half a century before he offered it to Boise City. But there was a problem with the donation: How do you transport a bomb, even if it is defused, across state lines? “The railroad wouldn’t take it,” he said. “UPS wouldn’t take it. The postal service wouldn’t deliver it.”

Force, then 90 years old, took matters into his own hands. He got into his car with his wife, Mary, and drove the 350 miles south to Boise City to deliver it himself. Soon, a simulated bomb crater was formed from concrete in front of the Boise City Chamber of Commerce office (an old railroad caboose). The bomb casing, which is slightly bigger than the bombs that fell on the town in 1943, was refurbished and planted so it jugged out of the crater, and a “Boise City—Still Booming” sign was erected. The whole thing was unveiled complete with fireworks and TV cameras.

Inez Garrett, wife of the town’s electrical system operator in the ’40s, Frank Garrett, shared memories of the bombing with a TV reporter. “[That] was a pretty exciting

night,” she recalled. Of the airmen who did the bombing, she said, “Nobody holds a grudge against anybody. They were just some young men trying to protect their country and trying to learn.”

The young men of *Thundermug* did learn. They went on to lead an 800-plane daylight raid on Berlin and become one of the most highly decorated of all WWII bomber crews. All of them survived the war.

For the wartime residents of Boise City, caught off guard in a highly unlikely and dangerous situation, there wasn’t much to learn. As a *Time* magazine article noted, “Boise City citizens, first in the U.S. to get a real blitzing, acted the way most civilians would act who had never been bombed before. Most of them ran like hell....” ★

CHUCK LYONS writes from Rochester, New York.



The Boise City Bombed monument—a rare light-hearted WWII memorial—features a shell similar to those dropped on the town on July 5, 1943. Appropriately, fireworks were shot off at the dedication ceremony 50 years later.

COURTESY OF JOY FRANKLIN

They Fell from the Sky

“ONE A DAY IN TAMPA BAY.” With characteristic smart-alecky GI humor, the catchy phrase summed up what army airmen at MacDill Field felt about the Martin B-26 Marauder medium bomber and its safety record. An awful lot of Widow-makers (one of many unflattering names that stuck to the hard-to-handle B-26) went splashing into the salty water around the big training base near Tampa, Florida. Marauders were just too easy to wreck, especially upon landing, when the short-ish wings required pilots to maintain uncomfortably high speeds to avoid stalling and crashing.

The B-26s in Tampa Bay accounted for just a handful of the US Army Air Forces planes that crashed in the States during World War II. The total figure is staggering: 7,114. Of those crashes, 6,500 were fatal, claiming the lives of some 15,599 people in all, according to Anthony J. Mireles’s exhaustive *Fatal Army Air Forces Aviation Accidents in the United States, 1941–1945* (2006).

Almost all of the dead—15,530—were army air forces pilots or air crewmen. Most of the remainder were civilian flight instructors or contractors who were aboard. A handful were civilians on the ground.

One reason for this shocking death toll and loss of aircraft was the sheer number of military planes streaking through US airspace in preparation for deployment overseas. Another reason was the preponderance of new, inexperienced pilots. A total of 193,440 men graduated from army air forces pilot training from July 1, 1939, through August 31, 1945, according to *Men and Planes* (1955), Volume VI of the official history *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. That put a lot of brand-new pilots at the controls of powerful machines that were extremely unforgiving of human error. Many ground crewmen were equally inexperienced, and mechanical mistakes could

bring down even the most experienced pilot.

Because fighter and bomber training flights tended to be conducted over sparsely inhabited areas for safety’s sake, many stateside military plane crashes occurred in national parks. The National Park Service maintains a descriptive list of these at www.nps.gov/articles/wwiiplanecrashes.htm.

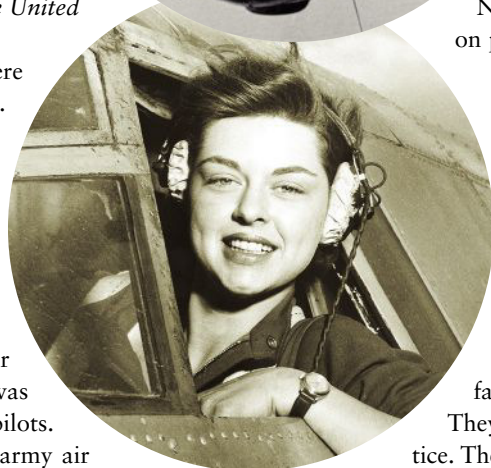
But not all crashes were away from towns and cities. On August 5, 1943, for instance, a Lockheed RB-34A-4 target tug (rigged to tow a canvas target for gunnery practice by fighter planes) was on its way from one Massachusetts airbase to another when it seemingly experienced mechanical troubles. The plane crashed into the side of Wolf Hill near Smithfield, Rhode Island, and all three men aboard were killed.

A more extreme instance of an air accident near or in a populated area was the devastating crash of a B-25 Mitchell medium bomber into the Empire State Building in New York City on July 28, 1945 (read about it on pages 52–53).

One set of aviators who flew military aircraft on the home front had a better safety record than the US Army Air Forces. The female flyers of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), though not officially members of the US military, assisted the army air forces by flying warplanes on non-combat missions all over the US from December 1942 through November 1944. According to WASP historian Sarah Byrn Rickman, they ferried planes from factories to military bases and from base to base.

They flew planes towing targets for gunnery practice. They even risked their lives test-flying repaired aircraft, to avoid the possible loss of a male combat pilot if the repairs were flawed. Of the WASP’s 1,102 female pilots, 38 were killed or listed as missing in stateside crashes, a percentage about half that of the male army flyers. ★

JIM KUSHLAN
publisher of *America in WWII*



Some of the earliest of the 7,000-plus stateside warplane crashes of World War II involved the B-26 bomber. It was hard to fly and packed with seven people—four are visible in this head-on shot of a B-26 in flight (top). Skilled pilots could manage it, however. One was Elizabeth “Libby” Gardner (above, in a B-26). As a Women Airforce Service Pilot, she ferried B-26s from place to place without incident.

Terror at the Circus

by Carl Zebrowski

FRIEDA PUSHNIK WAS SITTING on her chair, earning her living off the coin of the curious on July 6, 1944. It was very hot in Hartford, Connecticut, that day, in the 90s, and the air was thick with humidity and the smell of animals and hay. The Great Wallendas were overhead, walking the tightrope, when suddenly the band struck up “Stars and Stripes Forever.” The circus people jumped to attention. To them the song was more than a patriotic march. It was a signal that something was terribly wrong.

Someone had spotted fire. “A lick of flames could be seen racing up towards the top of the tent,” recalled Mary Wallace Bushnell, a schoolgirl who had traveled 30 miles from the suburbs for the rare wartime treat of a big family day out. “I thought it was a part of the show and was absolutely mesmerized watching it spread further.” The Wallendas climbed down to safety. Frieda Pushnik remained on her chair. Then an alert minstrel ran over, scooped up, and successfully rescued the 21-year-old side-show star whom the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus billed as the Armless Legless Girl Wonder.

Once the flames reached the roof, they shot across the canvas; Ringling, like most circuses, used paraffin melted in gasoline for waterproofing. About 7,000 panicked spectators ran, stumbled, crawled, leapt, clawed, and otherwise fought desperately to escape. Some jumped off the backs of bleachers; a few of those with longer drops did not survive the landing. Railings and the tent walls turned into deadly blockades where bodies piled up.

The lions had just finished their act and were herded to cage wagons parked outside. Emmett Kelly, the famous hobo clown, witnessed the efforts of lion tamer May Kovar. “She knew what might happen if one of her big cats got away..., and she stayed until the last one was out,” he recalled. “She stuck there at her own risk like the trooper she was and barely got out with her life.”

As the roof disintegrated into ash, the giant tent poles started falling. “As the last toppled,” reported *Time* magazine, “all the blazing canvas came down on the crowd. There was a brief, screaming struggle beneath it.” Though all the circus animals escaped the

inferno unscathed, many people were not so lucky. At least 167 died and 487 were treated for injuries. About 60 of the dead were under the age of 15. It all happened in less than seven minutes.

One of the young victims became a macabre poster child for the tragedy, one of the biggest disasters in US history. Little Miss 1565 was what they called her, from the body number that a morgue had put on her toe tag. The real name and identity of this young blond in a white dress remain a mystery, even though her death photo, in which she appeared to be merely sleeping, ran on newspaper front pages across the country.

After the fire, witnesses praised Kelly for his efforts. He later wrote of a little girl outside the big top, trying to get back in to find her mom. “Listen honey—listen to the old clown. You go way over there to that victory garden and wait for your mommy. She’ll be along soon.” The girl did as he said, but he never saw her again or found out whether her mother survived.

No one ever figured out how the blaze began. Two of the causes considered were a tossed cigarette and arson. A few years later, an Ohioan named Robert Segee, who had been a teenage circus hand at the time of the disaster, would confess to setting the fire. Five Ringling Brothers officials were charged with involuntary manslaughter, and four were found guilty, for little more than approving use of the standard canvas waterproofing method. They spent some months in prison and then were pardoned. Ringling Brothers never contested any monetary claims that arose from the disaster and paid out \$3.9 million in damages, almost all its profits over the next decade.

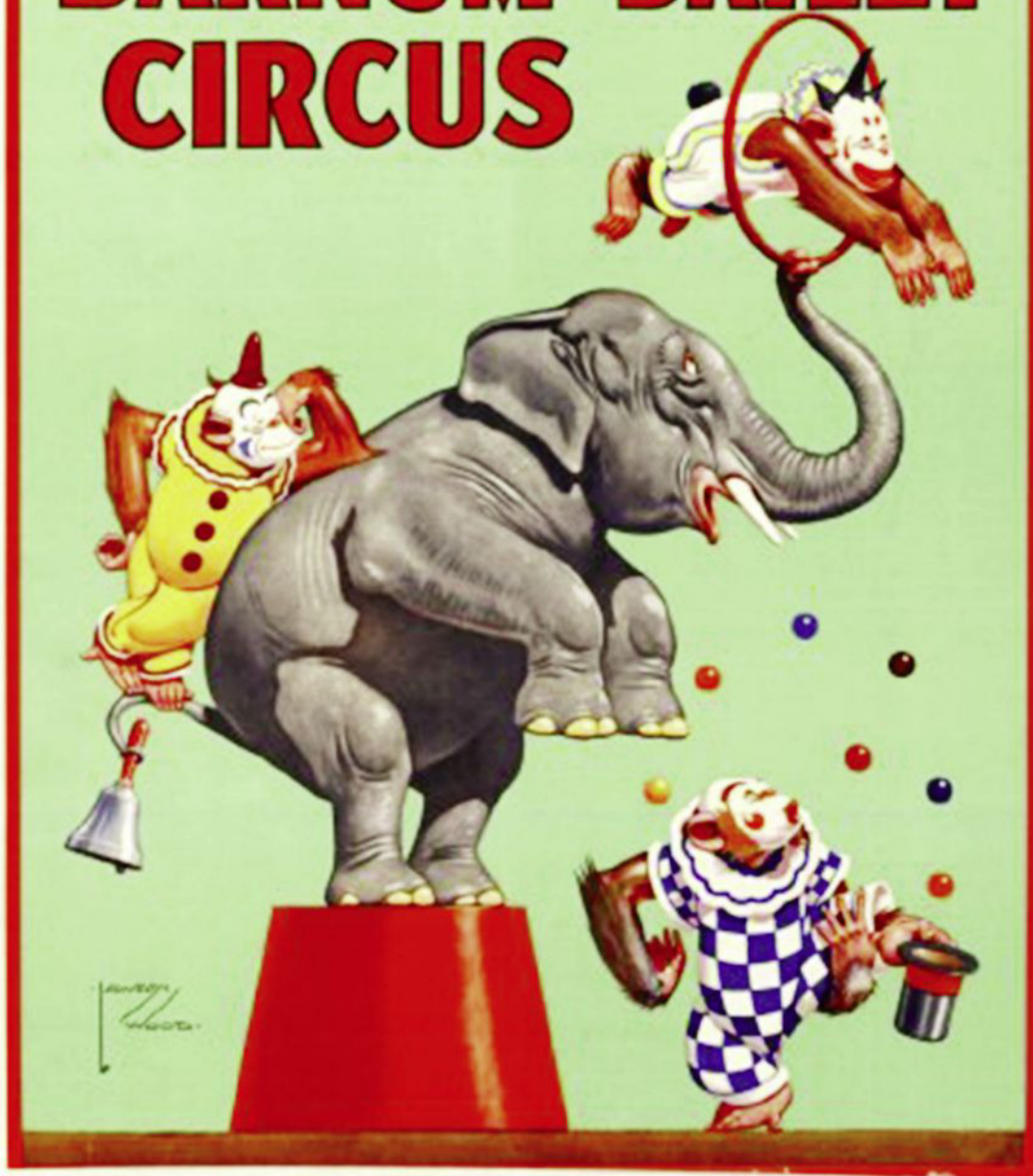
July 6, 1944, was a tragic day for Americans on the home front, as tragic as the bloody combat that raged overseas. “Leaving the show grounds, I walked past the ruins of the big top and saw some charred shoes and part of a clown doll lying on [the ground],” Kelly remembered. “That moment was when the tension of the past hours broke over me in a wave and I couldn’t keep from crying any longer.” ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America* in WWII, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine’s first issue.

It was a refreshing treat when the Greatest Show on Earth came to Hartford, Connecticut (opposite) in July 1944—something to break the wartime drudgery. But on the circus’s final day, flames changed fun into terror and tragedy.

OPPOSITE: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN *AMERICA* IN WWII, AUGUST 2010

RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS



AFTERNOON & NIGHT

HARTFORD

BARBOUR ST.
SHOW GROUNDS

WED.
JULY

5

|| THUR.
JULY

6

Dine and Dance

COCONUT



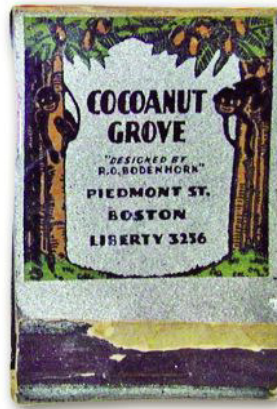


INFERNO in paradise

A thousand soldiers,
sailors, and civilians
packed Boston's
Cocoanut Grove nightclub
on November 28, 1942.

By night's end,
half of them were dead.

by **Chuck Lyons**



BOSTON FIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BOSTONFIREHISTORY.ORG

INFERNO in paradise by Chuck Lyons

THE COCOANUT GROVE WAS HOPPING on the night of November 28, 1942. About a thousand people were crammed into the popular Boston nightclub. The crowd was a cross-section of wartime Beantown: soldiers and sailors on leave, couples on dates, celebrities, football fans who had attended that day's Holy Cross-Boston College game, and others celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and promotions. Before the night was over, 492 of them were dead.

The fire that raged through the Cocoanut Grove that night lasted only 12 minutes. But it was the deadliest nightclub fire and the second-worst single-building fire in American history. One Boston firefighter later described how bodies were stacked against the door to the club's Shawmut Street exit. He showed his family the scratches on his legs "where people had clawed (at him) to pull them out." The death toll shocked the nation and briefly bumped the war from the main headlines of the country's newspapers.

The Cocoanut Grove was considered Boston's top nightspot from the end of Prohibition in December 1933 into the early war years. The one-and-a-half-story building at 17 Piedmont Street that housed the club had been constructed in 1916 and had been a warehouse, a garage, and a Prohibition-era speakeasy. By wartime it had become a collection of dining rooms, barrooms, and lounges, each offering food, drinks, and dancing in a South Seas island décor, in an indoor tropical paradise of artificial palm trees and lots of rattan and bamboo. In the basement was a new bar called the Melody Lounge, along with the kitchen, freezers, and storage areas. The ground floor had a large dining room, a ballroom with a bandstand, and several bar areas, including the Broadway Lounge, which had recently been opened after several adjacent buildings were renovated and added to the club. The dining room even had a retractable roof that allowed a view of the moon and stars during warm weather. The main entrance to the

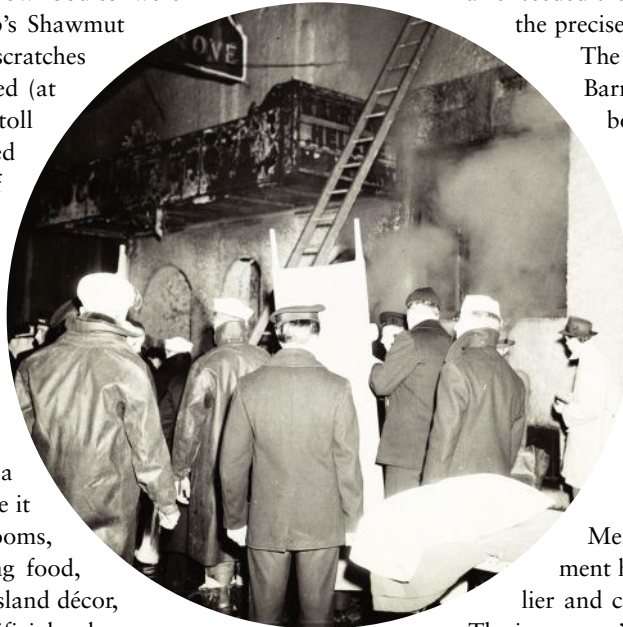
club was through a revolving door on the Piedmont Street side of the building. Altogether, the club's various rooms could hold about 600 people—at least that was the *legal* capacity. The crowd far exceeded that limit on the night of the fire, though the precise number of patrons is unknown.

The king of the Cocoanut Grove was owner Barnet "Barney" Welansky. He was a tough boss, and rumor had it he hired street thugs to work as waiters and bouncers. Worse, he had some exterior doors bolted shut and even bricked up one doorway when he realized some customers were using these exits to sneak out without paying. On the night of the fire, Welansky was in Massachusetts General Hospital, recovering from a heart attack. Many of the fire's victims would be rushed to that same hospital.

The fire began in the newly opened Melody Lounge. The Boston Fire Department had inspected the lounge only days earlier and certified that it met all fire regulations.

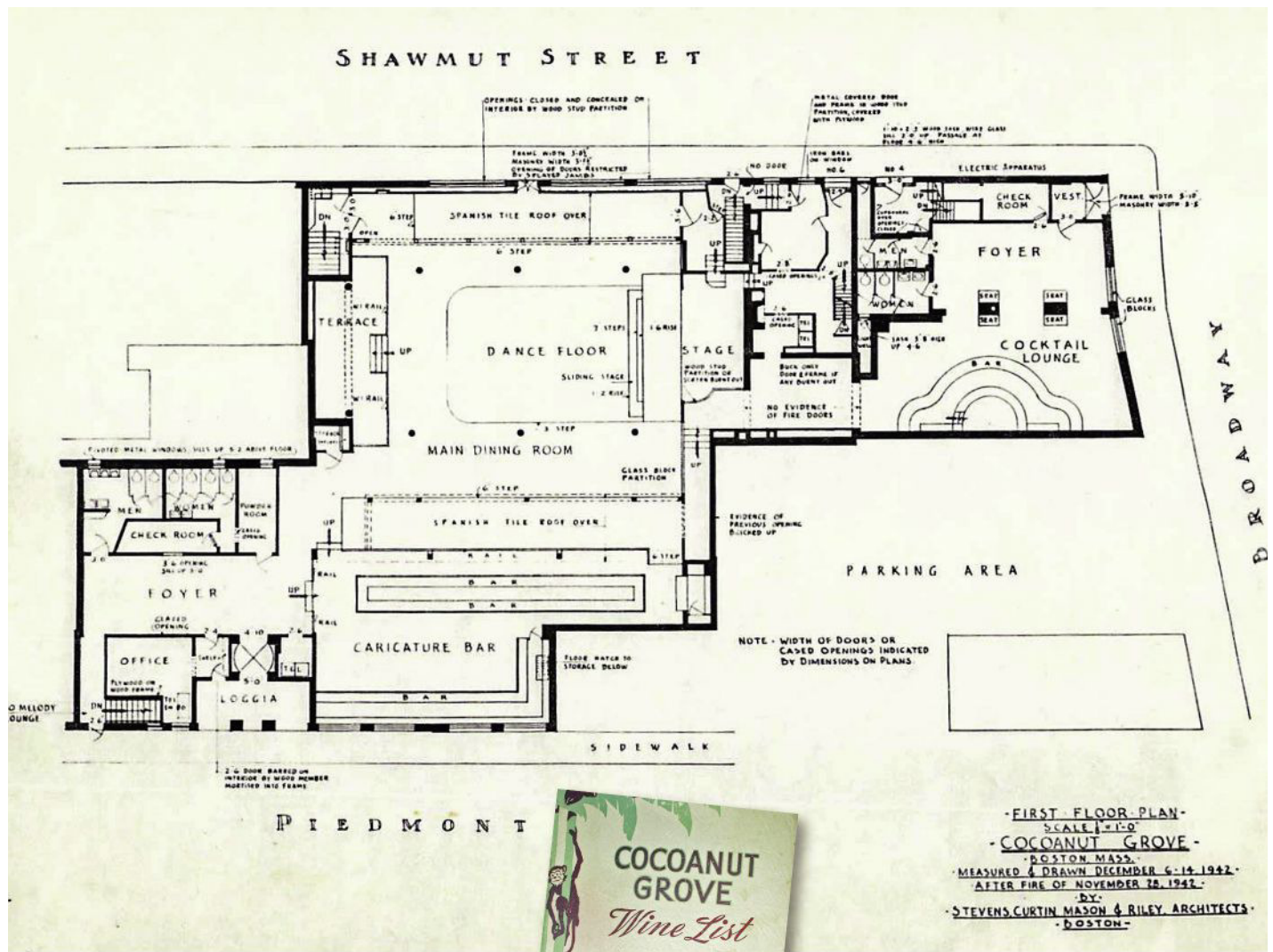
The inspectors' report pointed out that while conducting the inspection, a fire department lieutenant had touched a match to the room's paper decorations and determined they would not burn. The report also noted that there was "a sufficient number of exits and fire extinguishers."

Despite passing the fire inspection, the Melody Lounge was still operating illegally. Welansky had not obtained a certificate of operation for the lounge from the city's building inspection division. It has never been determined whether he didn't understand



PREVIOUS SPREAD & LEFT: BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, PRINT DEPARTMENT

Previous spread: Morning lights the Cocoanut Grove after the deadliest nightclub fire in US history. Above, top: A matchbook reflects the tropical paradise motif that helped make the club a Boston hotspot. Above, center: Smoke pours from the building as rescuers work outside.



that the certificate was required or simply decided not to bother obtaining one.

The fire started around 10:15 P.M., while pianist and singer Goody Goodelle was performing on the Melody Lounge's revolving stage. In the fire's aftermath, most people believed the blaze began after someone loosened a lightbulb among the lounge's palm tree decorations, probably to provide some privacy for romance. Stanley Tomaszewski, a 16-year-old busboy working at the club illegally, was told to retighten the bulb, but as he attempted to do so, it fell and broke. After returning with a replacement, he struck a match so he could find the socket in the dark. One eyewitness said Tomaszewski blew out the match after screwing in the bulb and the match never came in contact with the decorative palm tree fronds. A second eyewitness, however, claimed that the match burned down to the boy's fingers, causing him to drop it, and it fell among the fronds.

Whatever actually happened, a moment later several patrons thought they saw a flicker of flame in the lounge's palm tree ceiling decorations. As they watched, they saw the decorations change color and burst into flame. Bartenders tried to extinguish the fire with water and the spray from seltzer bottles while some club patrons started



Top to bottom: A first-level floor plan locates the Broadway Lounge (cocktail lounge), ballroom (dance floor), and main dining room; the wine list graphics play up the tropical theme; Goody Goodelle was performing in the basement Melody Lounge when the fire broke out there; Westerns star Buck Jones died from burns and smoke inhalation.

for the only public exit from the Melody Lounge, a four-foot-wide set of stairs leading up to the ground floor. As other furnishings ignited, a ball of flame and toxic gas formed and raced across the room toward the stairs. A wild panic swept through the crowd as the fireball traveled up the stairs and burst into the foyer area, where coatrooms, restrooms, and the main entrance were located. "There was a flash," bartender John Bradley later testified. "Fire ran right across the ceiling. Smoke hit me in the face. I put my hands to my head and my hair was ablaze." Another survivor said the "air itself appeared to be on fire."

Upstairs, club patrons in the dining area were unaware of what was happening. Then a young girl ran screaming across the foyer with her hair on fire.

INFERNO in paradise by Chuck Lyons

The fireball—or what other witnesses described as “a great wave” of flames—then exploded into the dining room area, where a majority of the club-goers were crowded around tables awaiting the start of the 10 P.M. floor show, already 15 minutes late. Smoke swirled through hallways, and blazing draperies fell, setting people’s clothes and hair on fire. The lights went out. Some customers huddled under tables. Others were trampled to death in the panic.

The patrons in the Broadway Lounge were last to know of the fire. They were alerted that something was happening when occupants of the dining area rushed in seeking an exit. The smoke, heat, and fumes followed on their heels.

ONCE THE LIGHTS WENT OUT, it was pitch black, recounted Dr. Saul Davis (who died at age 89 in 2008, the fire’s last known survivor). There was a “cloud of thick black smoke and people were yelling and screaming and running. You could hear tables being thrown over, dishes breaking, and people running and not knowing where to run, bumping into each other.”

Some survivors from the upstairs level described how a club employee in a gray suit and a hatcheck girl continued to demand that patrons not leave without settling their checks and paying to retrieve their coats.

Many of the club’s patrons tried to flee through the main entrance, the single revolving door. The door jammed quickly as people piled into it. When firefighters arrived on the scene, they had to dismantle the door to get into the building. They found nearly 200 people dead in heaps behind it. City building commissioner James Mooney later said he could see how people had fought one another in their panic to get out. “Many of the bodies were actually torn apart.”

Other exits were useless. There were the bolted side doors. A plate-glass window, which could have been smashed for escape, was boarded up. Some unlocked doors were unusable because they opened inward. Such was the case in the Broadway Lounge, where panicked patrons pushed against the doors in vain and piled up in front of them.

A few blocks from the club, fire crews were fighting an automobile fire when they spotted smoke at the Cocoanut Grove. They were among the first emergency personnel to arrive at the scene, which eventually involved 187 firefighters, 26 engine com-

panies, 5 ladder companies, 3 rescue companies, and 1 water tower. Servicemen came from nearby bars to help. Ambulances arrived from surrounding jurisdictions such as Newton and Brookline and from the Charlestown Navy Yard and the Chelsea Navy Hospital. Parcel-delivery trucks were pressed into service to transport victims. Fire equipment and other emergency vehicles clogged the small, congested streets around the club.

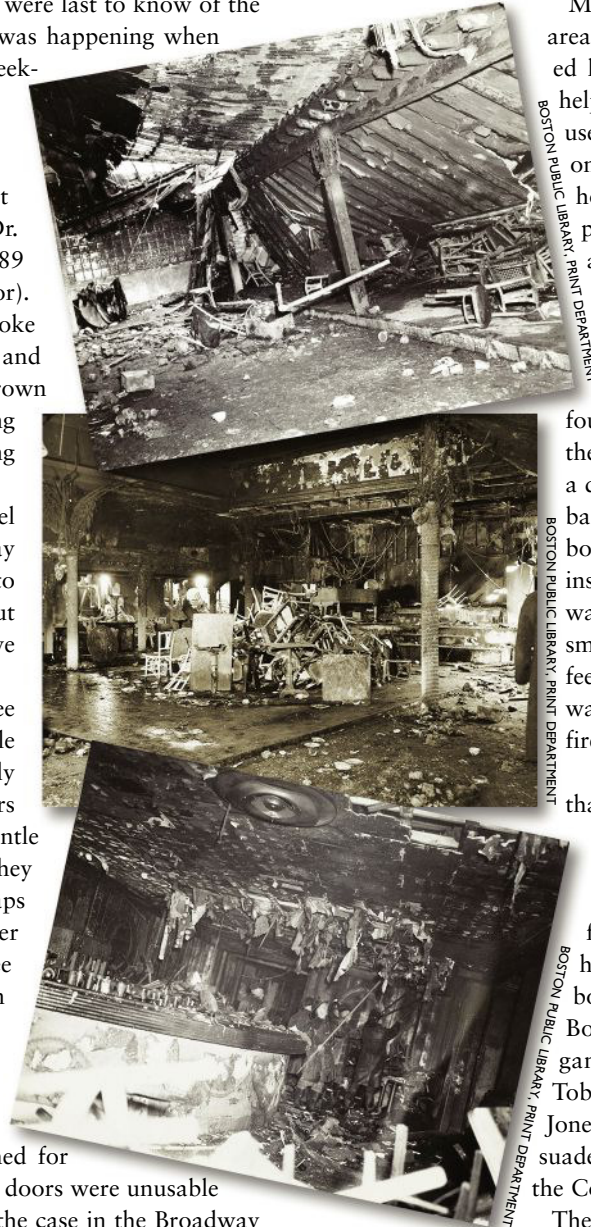
Martial law was imposed on the entire area around 1:35 A.M. It may have prevented hooliganism and looting, but it didn’t help with the falling temperature. Water used in the firefighting effort turned to ice on the cobblestone streets and glued hoses to the ground. The firefighters pressed on, knocking down the flames and spraying icy water on dead and living victims who were dragged smoldering out of the club.

Once the fire was extinguished, rescuers entered the building. They found several victims dead, still sitting in their seats with drinks in their hands, and a dead bartender still standing behind his bar. One firefighter reported finding the body of a woman wearing a fur coat inside a phone booth. It appeared that she was trying to make a phone call when the smoke overcame her, killing her on her feet. The nickel meant for the pay phone was lying on the floor of the booth, the firefighter said.

Among the dead were a couple married that day in nearby Cambridge and more than 50 military men. One family lost all four of its GI sons, who were home on holiday leave. Also killed was famous movie cowboy Buck Jones, who had been traveling the country on a war bond campaign. He had attended the Boston College–Holy Cross football game with Boston’s mayor, Maurice Tobin, earlier in the day. Even though Jones was fighting a cold, agents had persuaded him to have dinner that evening at the Cocoanut Grove.

The outcome of the football game Jones had attended that day actually saved lives. Boston College, ranked number one in the country, had lost to unranked rival Holy Cross 55-12. The college had canceled what was supposed to have been a victory party at the Cocoanut Grove, unwittingly keeping many people from becoming fire casualties.

About half the patrons inside the Cocoanut Grove did survive.



Above, top and center: The now-burned-out ballroom and dining room was filled and hopping on the night of the fire.
Above and opposite, bottom: The street-level Broadway Lounge was also filled. Patrons there found out about the blaze only when diners and dancers came running in from the ballroom in a desperate search for an exit.



Above, left: Soldiers and sailors on leave and dancing or dining in the club or elsewhere in the neighborhood were among the able-bodied who joined in the rescue effort. Above, right: The following day sailors survey the damage in the daylight.



INFERNO in paradise by Chuck Lyons

Five found refuge in a walk-in refrigerator. Bartender Daniel Weiss and pianist Goodelle soaked cloth napkins in water and breathed through them until they found their way out. They and several employees managed to escape by crawling through a kitchen window. Dr. Davis and his wife also escaped through a kitchen window. Once outside the building, Davis said, they were both “coughing and throwing up black soot. It was terrible.”

US Coast Guard Petty Officer Clifford Johnson was credited with going back into the club four times to rescue people. Johnson suffered third-degree burns over more than half his body and spent

Square garage. Long lines formed at the two makeshift mortuaries as families came searching for loved ones. Some bodies were hardly touched by the fire and were still attired in their formal wear, while others were unrecognizable and were covered with blankets. Four days passed before all the victims were identified. A Boston city councilman later charged that some of the bodies had been robbed of cash, wallets, watches, and rings worth some \$3,800, though how he arrived at that figure remains a mystery.

Barney Welansky, the club owner who had bragged about his connections with politicians and organized crime figures, was



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Boston policemen guard an entrance to the club to keep out looters and any others who may have had questionable intentions, as well as the merely curious passerby who could get injured exploring the charred and debris-filled interior.

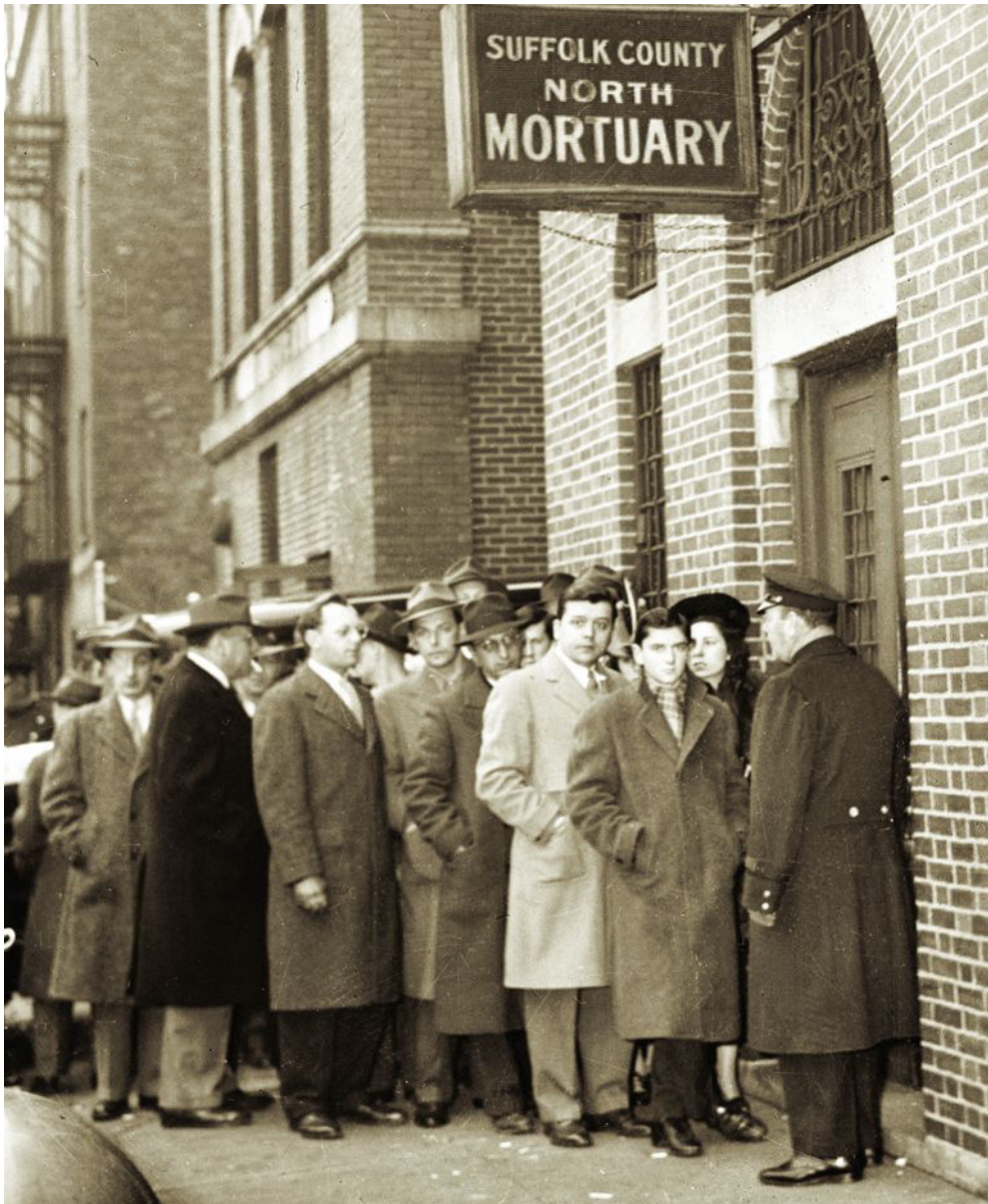
21 months in the hospital before marrying one of his nurses, Marion Donovan, and returning home to Missouri. At the time, Johnson was the most severely burned person ever to survive. In a tragic irony, he died years later in a fiery automobile crash.

Marshall Cook, a chorus member from South Boston, led eight girls from the chorus and others to an adjoining roof that led out of the second-floor dressing room. They descended from there on a ladder, but still had to make a six-foot drop to the ground. Thirty-five people escaped this way.

The dead were taken to temporary morgues at the Film Exchange Transfer Company on Shawmut Street and at the Park

eventually convicted on 19 counts of manslaughter and sentenced to 12 to 15 years in prison. After serving four years, he was diagnosed with cancer and was pardoned by the governor, Maurice Tobin, who in 1945 had left his post as Boston's mayor for the higher office. “I wish I’d died with the others in the fire,” Welansky said upon his release. He died nine weeks later.

Stanley Tomaszewski, the busboy whose quickly lit match might have started the fire, survived and testified at the official inquiry. But Tomaszewski (who lived until 1994) was cleared of any responsibility for the tragedy. The official investigation of the blaze listed the cause as unknown.



BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, PRINT DEPARTMENT

Family members of club patrons presumed killed in the fire line up at Boston's Suffolk County North Mortuary the next day to identify bodies.

Speculation and investigation into the origin of the fire continue to the present day. Theorists have suggested faulty wiring and careless smoking, and because America was at war at the time of the fire, sabotage was investigated. None of these hypotheses was ever proved. In 1997, former Boston firefighter Charles Kenney reexamined the incident and concluded that the presence of methyl chloride, a highly flammable gas propellant used in refrigeration systems, had greatly contributed to the fire's rapid spread, regardless of what had started it. (During the war, there was a shortage of the refrigerant Freon, and methyl chloride was used as a replacement.)

HARD LESSONS WERE LEARNED from the Cocoanut Grove fire, and soon Massachusetts and other states enacted laws for public establishments. Flammable decorations and inward-swinging exit doors were banned. Exit signs had to be visible at all times. Revolving doors had to be flanked by at least

one normal, outward-swinging door or be retrofitted to permit the doors to fold flat. Under no circumstances was any emergency exit to be chained or bolted shut.

Some good surfaced after the tragedy, too. New ways of caring for burn and smoke-inhalation victims were developed. Boston psychiatrist Erich Lindemann studied the grieving process of many families of the dead and published a groundbreaking paper on the subject in September 1943. Some of the earliest research into post-traumatic stress disorder was done.

Today a plaque embedded in the sidewalk where victims were brought out of the building reads "In memory of the more than 490 people that died in the Cocoanut Grove Fire on November 28 1942." The spot where the club stood is a parking lot. ★

CHUCK LYONS of Rochester, New York, has written about the accidental bombing of an Oklahoma town, the wartime Kilroy fad, and other topics for America in WWII.

The Empire State Crash

by Carl Zebrowski

CATHERINE O'CONNOR WAS STANDING with an armload of letters on the 79th floor of the world's tallest building when a large plane soaring through the Manhattan sky at more than 200 mph crashed through the wall and exploded. "There were five or six seconds—I was tottering on my feet trying to keep my balance—and three-quarters of the office was instantly consumed in this sheet of flame," she recalled. "One man was standing inside the flame. I could see him. It was a co-worker, Joe Fountain. His whole body was on fire."

The flight that ended with this crash into the Empire State Building had begun without worry for Lieutenant Colonel William Frank Smith, Jr. In Europe the West Pointer had logged 1,000 hours in the air fighting Nazis. There were no German fighters to contend with on July 28, 1945, when the 27-year-old pilot and his flight chief took their B-25 Mitchell medium bomber on a sleepy hop from Bedford, Massachusetts, to Newark, New Jersey. Along for the ride was a hitchhiking navy aviation machinist, Albert Perna, who was finally going to see his parents after his brother, also in the navy, was killed in a kamikaze attack.

By about 10 that morning, the cloud cover was low and solid. Disoriented, and flying by sight rather than instruments, Smith ended up over New York City. He pushed the plane down just beneath the clouds to 900 feet and made radio contact with the tower at LaGuardia airport. The controller warned of dangerously low visibility: "We're unable to see the top of the Empire State Building."

Buzzing past Rockefeller Center and some skyscrapers with narrow misses, Smith pulled back on the stick to guide the plane back up into the clouds. One of Catherine O'Connor's co-workers heard a rumbling sound—the bomber's twin engines—and turned toward the window. The plane was heading right for him. In an instant 10 tons of aluminum and steel tore an 18-by-20-foot hole through the Empire State Building's north wall between the 78th and 79th floors.

The impact set off the hundreds of gallons of gasoline on board with a blast that shook the 102-story tower like an earthquake. Debris fell 913 feet to the street below, some landing five blocks away. One of the engines crashed all the way through the opposite exterior

wall, soared across the street, and smashed through a skylight of a 12-story building. The other shot into an elevator shaft, where it plunged onto an empty car and smashed it into a heap in the basement.

Betty Lou Oliver was the operating attendant in another elevator. Her husband was returning home from the navy, and it was her last day on the job. The explosion blew Oliver out of her car. As the initial chaos settled down, co-workers treated her wounds and loaded her into one of the other elevators to be sent down for further care. She had barely begun to descend when the cable, apparently damaged by flying debris or fire, snapped, sending the car into a free fall. Seventy-nine stories. Donald Maloney, a 17-year-old coastguardsman in uniform, was on the ground floor and heard screaming as the car thundered past. He and a fireman ran down and eventually found Oliver. "Thank God, the navy's here!" she said when she saw Maloney. "I'll be OK now."

Office workers, meanwhile, scrambled down dozens of flights of stairs to escape the inferno. Gloria Pall raced from the 56th floor, where she worked. Though some 20 floors below the crash, she had been thrown by the explosion and injured her arm. She received treatment outside, where four alarms' worth of fire crews rescued survivors and fought the blaze.

The fire was out in 40 minutes. But 13 people were dead, 3 from the plane and 10 from the building, killed instantly. Joe Fountain escaped, but died a few days later. Betty Lou Oliver had broken both legs and her back, but, miraculously, recovered. She is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest fall survived in an elevator.

If that cloudy morning had a silver lining it was that it was Saturday. Only a fraction of the 15,000-person weekday work force was on site. As it was, the structural damage would be repaired quickly, and, for most survivors, life would go on as usual. As Gloria Pall left the scene, she ran into her boss, who was oblivious to her disheveled appearance and the sling on her arm. "You ought to come in next Saturday because you didn't even work two hours today," he said. ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America* in WWII, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine's first issue.

Smoke billows from the Empire State Building (opposite) after Lieutenant Colonel William Frank Smith, Jr., disoriented by the fog, crashed his plane into the 79th floor. The B-25's gas tanks exploded on impact, killing 13.

OPPOSITE NATIONAL ARCHIVES. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN *AMERICA* IN WWII, OCTOBER 1945





The Teleporting Warship

by Carl Zebrowski

IF 1943 HAD BEEN MORE LIKE 2011, the conspiracy-theory and strange-phenomena crowd could have sent in ghost-questers, monster-stalkers, and alien-hunters to investigate. They might have experienced blurry sightings, mysterious noises, and goose-pimpled forearms, maybe even shot some startling footage on night-vision or heat-sensing cameras. Then, a team of experts could have interpreted it all, nipping any future debate in the bud with an indisputable conclusion determined through strict application of the scientific method: On October 28, 1943, the 300-foot-long, 1,200-ton-displacing destroyer escort USS *Eldridge* (DE-173) teleported from Philadelphia 270 miles away to Norfolk, Virginia, and back.

Believers of what became known as the Philadelphia Experiment—which became almost famous after a 1984 movie of the same name—weren’t making noise in 1943, however. Public chattering on the subject didn’t begin until about 1955, when a Carlos Miguel Allende (also known as Carl M. Allen) sent a letter mentioning “the Philadelphia Experiment” to the auto-parts salesman and amateur astronomer Morris Jessup, author of *The Case for the UFO*. Jessup theorized in his book about antigravity and electromagnetism as possible propulsion methods for UFOs. Allende told him that he had been a merchant mariner during World War II and that, from the SS *Andrew Furuseth*, he had witnessed the *Eldridge* appear and disappear in Norfolk. He said he knew others on his own ship and from the *Eldridge* who also had witnessed the incident.

Two years later, the Office of Naval Research in Washington, DC, received an anonymously mailed copy of Jessup’s book with notes written inside by three different-color pens. Some of the notes referred to the Philadelphia Experiment. The navy called in Jessup to help investigate, and Jessup determined that all three sets of markings were done by the same person. That person was Allende. The navy tried to track him down, but the address they had led them to an abandoned farmhouse.

Things soon started heading downhill for Jessup. Sales of his book were down, his wife left him, and he was in a bad car accident that sent him into a long, slow recovery. On April 19, 1959, he received a call from a Dr. Manson Valentine to set up a meeting about a breakthrough in the Philadelphia Experiment mystery. The next day Jessup was found dead in his car with a hose attached to the exhaust pipe and run through a slightly opened

rear window. The death was ruled a suicide, but it was easy enough for suspicious minds to overlook that his wife and friends said he was stuck in a depression and speculate about foul play. The movement to expose the ostensible coverup of the disappearing and reappearing battleship now had a martyr.

Explanations of the Philadelphia Experiment range as wide as the imagination, but there is a more or less common core. The foundation, believers said, was Albert Einstein’s Unified Field Theory. Large electrical generators could manipulate electromagnetic and gravitational forces to bend light around objects and make them invisible. The US Navy began experimenting at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and fitted the *Eldridge* with the necessary equipment. The operation was tested with some success on July 23, 1943. Engineers recalibrated the machines and tested again on October 28. This time the ship disappeared at Philadelphia in a flash of blue light, appeared in Norfolk, and then reappeared back in Philadelphia. Some even said it traveled back in time some 10 seconds along the way.

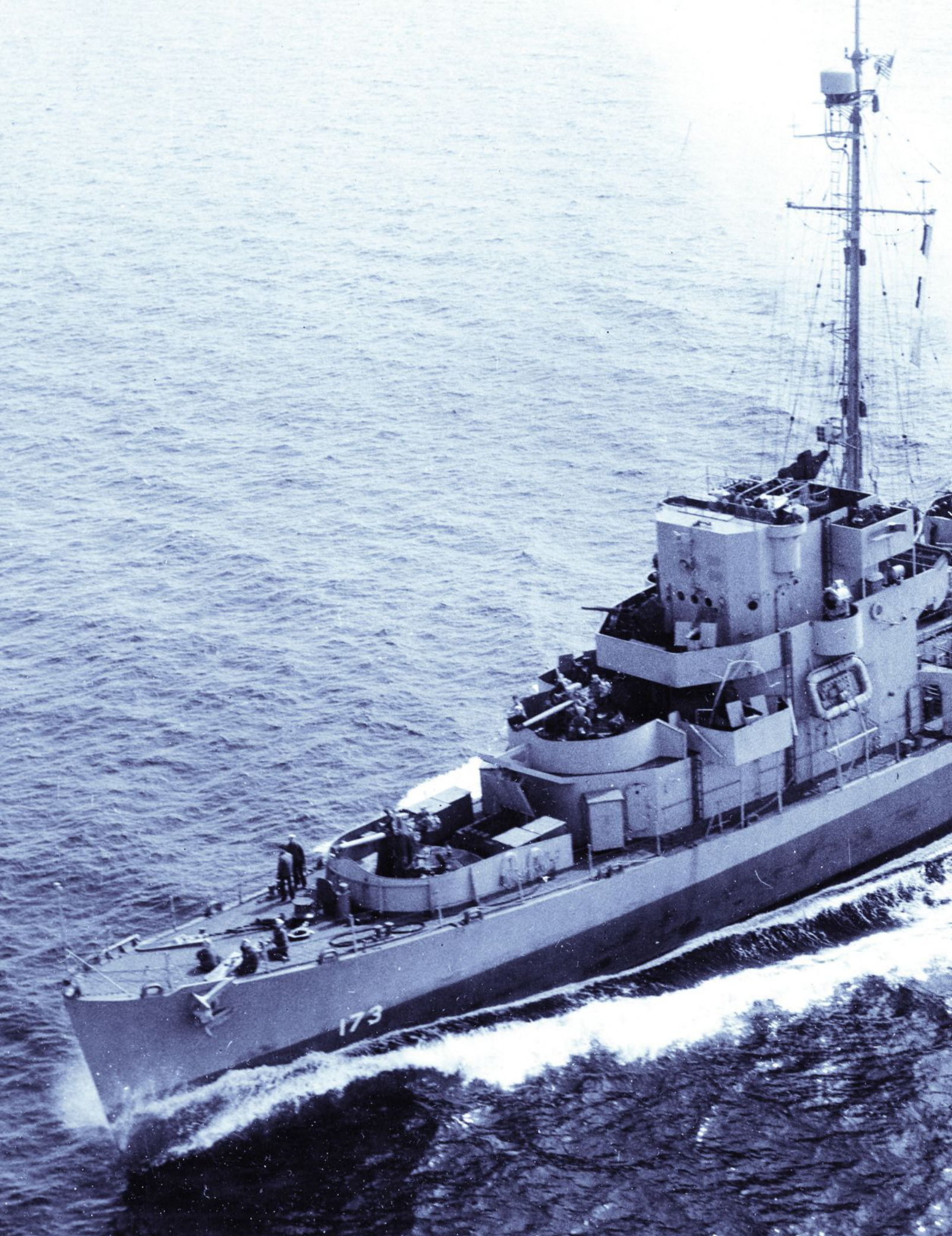
Holes in the arguments of the Philadelphia Experiment believers were big enough to pass a battleship through (teleportation not required). The navy itself responded. Official records show no traces of anything related to invisibility or teleportation. As for the *Eldridge*, ship logs are available from its commissioning on August 27, 1943, through that December. The ship was never in Philadelphia. It turned out also that the *Andrew Furuseth* was never in Norfolk.

As unlikely as it all seems, researchers today are making progress in the engineering of invisibility. Guy Cramer of Hyper-Stealth Biotechnology Corporation in British Columbia makes digitally generated camouflage designs for the military and is working on more sophisticated stealth technology. He showed a video to a writer from *The Atlantic* that showed a woman whose body was turned invisible on camera so her head appeared to float in midair. “We’re bending the entire spectrum of light—infrared, ultraviolet, thermal,” Cramer told the writer. “People are disappearing. It doesn’t use cameras or mirrors or require power.” Cramer wasn’t offering explanations, but if he ultimately succeeds in his goal, Philadelphia Experiment skeptics may someday look as foolish as flat-earthers. ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America in WWII*, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine’s first issue.

The USS *Eldridge* (opposite) guarded war supply convoys bound for North Africa and the Pacific, 1944–1945. But her claim to fame? She teleported across 270 miles in 1943—according to Philadelphia Experiment believers.

OPPOSITE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN *AMERICA* IN WWII, DECEMBER 2011



WWII MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM • Part 5



WARTIME FEAR
AND TENSION



EXPLOSION



at port chicago

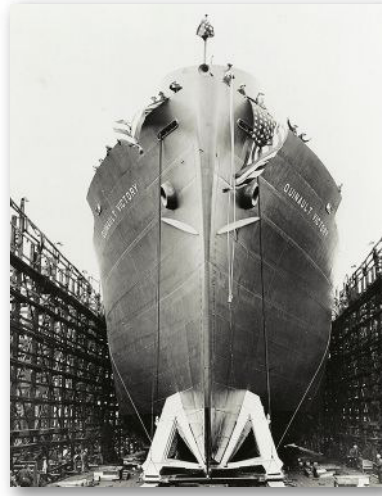
When massive blasts killed 202 black sailors loading ammo onto ships, survivors said “no more” to the deadly work.

Was it mutiny—or sanity in the face of racism?

by **Chuck Lyons**



EXPLOSION at port chicago by Chuck Lyons



PORT CHICAGO, CALIFORNIA, WAS A DANGEROUS PLACE IN MID-1944. Along the broad piers and among the myriad warehouses of the US Navy depot there, 30 miles northeast of San Francisco, a workforce of 1,400 black sailors logged long hours loading cargo ships with 500- and 1,000-pound bombs, artillery and anti-aircraft shells, bullets, and depth charges. The situation was a literal powder keg.

America's hungry Pacific war machine pushed the pace of the dock work: ammunition to beat down the Japanese couldn't come fast enough. A tight around-the-clock schedule at Port Chicago encouraged units with no special training in loading munitions to race against one another, while white officers bet on whose men would load the most tonnage per shift. Corners were cut to save time. A serious accident was bound to happen.

Two and a half years into the war, the prejudices of American society on the whole were the prejudices of the US military. Most black soldiers and sailors worked as laborers in one capacity or another. Few saw combat. Many never left the United States, even as campaigns ramped up in Europe and the Pacific. In 1943, more than 80 percent of the army's 504,000 black soldiers remained at stateside military bases.

In early 1944, Hamilton Fish III, Republican Congressman from New York, challenged War Department policies on segregation. The response from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson was that "a relatively large proportion of the Negroes inducted in the Army have fallen within the lower educational classifications, and many of the Negro units have accordingly been unable to master the techniques

of modern weapons." Stimson's rebuttal failed to account for the concentration of all black soldiers into just a few segregated units, and his remarks led black leaders such as Truman Gibson—a Roosevelt administration advocate for black military personnel whose official role was advisor to Stimson—to question the military loudly.

Segregation was the norm at Port Chicago, where white officers struggled to oversee dock work without the guidance of proven munitions-loading procedures. By about 10 P.M. on July 17, 1944, black seamen under their charge were preparing the empty merchant ship *Quinault Victory* for loading. On the opposite side of the pier, others were packing the last of nearly 5,000 tons of ammunition into the *E.A. Bryan*. Another 429 tons sat in 16 railroad cars nearby.

At 10:18 a white flash lit up the night sky.

Witnesses later reported hearing a ring followed by the sound of splintering wood and an explosion.

"I managed to get to my feet and started out the door when there was a second explosion and I saw barracks go down and [heard] the sound of men screaming," said Floyd L. Scott, who had been painting. The follow-up blast was felt as far away as Nevada. "Then the ammunition started going off," Scott continued.



ALL PHOTOS THIS STORY: NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Previous spread: Fragments of the *Quinault Victory* poke through the surface of Suisun Bay following the July 17, 1944, explosion at Port Chicago Naval Depot. Top: The *Quinault Victory* at Portland's Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation in June 1944. Her career would last exactly one month. Above: Like the seamen lost at Port Chicago, these cargo handlers at the US Navy base at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides Islands (now Vanuatu), lugged six-inch shells and other munitions—(left to right) Seamen 1st Class Raymond Wynn, Edward L. Clavo, and Jesse Davis.



With the battered hull of the *Quinault Victory* looming offshore, navy officials sift through Port Chicago's rubble-strewn waterfront. The facility's importance to the Pacific war required that it be back in operation quickly. It was—within a month.

Joe Small was resting in his barracks at the time. “It picked me up off my bunk—I was holding onto my mattress—and flipped me over,” he remembered. “I hit the floor with my mattress on top of me.” The mattress protected him from flying glass, wood, and metal that flew like bullets in every direction.

In an instant, the pier and the *E.A. Bryan* vanished. The epic eruption tossed the 12,000-ton *Quinault Victory* into the air and plunked her down bow first in water 500 feet away. Nearby buildings and railroad cars were destroyed. Base barracks were knocked off their foundations and demolished. Almost every building in the town of Port Chicago, 1.5 miles away, was damaged or wrecked. Unexploded shells fell to earth as far as two miles from the blast. Chunks of metal flew past a US Army Air Forces airplane passing overhead at 9,000 feet. A pillar of smoke climbed some two miles into the California sky.

All 320 men who had been working near the pier lay dead. Of that number, 202 were black enlisted men who had been loading munitions. Another 390 people were injured, including 233 black men. This single incident accounted for 15 percent of all black American casualties in the war. Civilian and military damages were estimated at \$12 million.

Meanwhile, navy personnel responded quickly to the scene, dousing fires, aiding the injured, and collecting scattered body parts. Due to the facility's importance to the Pacific war effort,

cleanup and rebuilding commenced immediately. In less than a month it was up and running again.

IN THE WAKE OF THE ACCIDENT, a navy court of inquiry met to determine the cause. A month later it ruled out sabotage and specific equipment problems. It also dismissed the work-related betting of officers as a factor, ruling that the practice merely promoted healthy competition, though the court did warn against continuing such betting specifically on the loading of explosives. In the end, the court failed to pinpoint an exact cause, despite listing several potential materials-related triggers of the initial blast as well as “rough and careless handling of the explosives being loaded.” It suggested that, based on the gathered testimony, “the colored enlisted personnel are neither temperamentally or intellectually capable of handling high explosives.”

Port Chicago's remaining ordnance battalion personnel were shifted to other bases, many of them suffering from shock and wondering whether they could be in for another nightmare. They were not given survivor leaves, but were quickly sent back to work loading munitions ships—under the same dangerous conditions. “I was a winch operator,” Small recalled. “I missed killing a man an average of once a day—killing or permanently injuring a man. And it was all because of rushing, speed. I didn't want to go back into this.”



On August 9, less than a month after the explosion, 258 Port Chicago veterans who had been transferred to the nearby Mare Island Naval Shipyard refused to load ammunition. They were arrested and imprisoned for three days on a barge. They were then reminded that mutiny was punishable by death and offered the opportunity to return to work. Shocked by the criminal charges and the threat of capital punishment, 208 men gave in, but they were imprisoned in the brig rather than being sent to work. Eventually charged with disobeying orders, they would receive bad conduct discharges and forfeit three months' pay. The remaining 50 sailors, including Small, refused to budge. "As far as we were concerned," he said, "mutiny could only be committed on the high seas. And we weren't on the high seas. I, for one, didn't consider refusing to go to work mutiny."

The trial for the 50 began September 14. In charge of the prosecution was Lieutenant Commander James F. Coakley, a former deputy chief prosecutor under Alameda County District Attorney Earl Warren, future chief justice of the US Supreme Court. Coakley argued that the defendants had conspired to disobey

orders. The defense, headed by Lieutenant Gerald E. Veltmann, emphasized the reluctance of the men to work in unsafe conditions and tried to draw a clear distinction between the insubordination of individuals and mutiny.

The proceedings quickly drew the attention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's young general counsel Thurgood Marshall, who charged that they were blatantly racist. He publicly stated, "I want to know why the Navy disregarded official warnings by the San Francisco waterfront unions—before the Port Chicago disaster—that an explosion was inevitable if they persisted in using untrained seamen in the loading of ammunition."

Despite Marshall's protests, on October 24, a seven-man navy panel found all 50 defendants guilty of mutiny. More than half were sentenced to 12- or 15-year prison terms; the remainder got 8- or 10-year terms. After doing time at Terminal Island Disciplinary Barracks in San Pedro, near Los Angeles, each would be dishonorably discharged. Marshall asserted that the trial was "one of the worst frame-ups we have come across in a long time. It was deliberately planned and staged by certain officers to discredit Negro seamen."

Like a mini-atomic bomb, searing dock-side detonations transformed Port Chicago's orderly waterfront into a wasteland. Above, clockwise from top left: utility poles that were snapped like toothpicks litter the ground; a concussed recreation hall leans on shaky legs; a sailor bleeding from a head wound inspects a wrecked car; and navy officials ponder pier-side devastation. Opposite: By September 1944, 36-year-old Thurgood Marshall was special counsel for the NAACP and had taken up the cause of Port Chicago's court-martialed stevedores. In 1967 his law credentials would earn him a place on the US Supreme Court.

EXPLOSION at port chicago by Chuck Lyons



Marshall kept the issue in the public eye and filed an appeal with the US Navy Judge Advocate General office. He argued that the men had been made scapegoats, that no direct order to load ammunition had ever been given and therefore could not have been disobeyed, and that Coakley had misled the court regarding the law on mutiny. The appeal was denied, but questions about the trial's fairness—and subtle pressure applied on the navy by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt—eventually won the convicted men a reprieve. In January 1946, 47 of them were granted amnesty and released from prison. (Two others were in the prison hospital, and a third was held for unrelated disciplinary issues.)

The publicity generated by the Port Chicago affair highlighted the plight of the black fighting man as well as the American military's growing manpower problem. By 1944 a handful of all-black units such as the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions were facing combat overseas. The 761st Tank Battalion, deployed to France in October 1944, quickly earned a reputation for boldness. The Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group did the same in the skies over North Africa and Europe. In the navy, meanwhile, all-black crews manned the USS *Mason* and the submarine chaser *PC-1264*. Still, for black troops and seamen alike, combat opportunities in the mostly white armed forces remained scarce.

Push finally came to shove in the winter of 1944–1945, when German forces surprised Americans with a stunning counterattack in the frigid forests of Belgium's Ardennes. Desperate for reinforce-

ments at what was perhaps the critical juncture of the European war, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower authorized the limited integration of 37 platoons of black GIs with white companies.

AFTER THE WAR IN EUROPE ENDED, veterans of the integrated outfits were either discharged or returned to their original units. But momentum had built. In June 1945 Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal announced that the navy would officially begin curbing segregation policies, and he named Lester Granger, the black executive director of the National Urban League, as a special advisor. "The Navy means business about revising its racial policy and making it possible for every member of the service to give his best efforts in his nation's cause without hinder or discrimination," Granger wrote.

In February 1946, a month after the men convicted of mutiny at Port Chicago were released from prison, the navy stepped to the fore among the armed services by announcing the end of official restrictions on all racial barriers. Two years later, President Harry Truman issued executive order 9981, which officially ended segregation in the entire military. Tragic as it was, America's worst home-front disaster of the war had encouraged a common-sense military solution. ★

CHUCK LYONS, a retired newspaper editor, writes frequently about the American home front for America in WWII.

BROADWAY

dims its lights...slightly

The Great White Way toned down its glare in case of enemy bombers, but the shows—and the music, the style, and the stars—went on despite the war.

by John E. Stanchak

RAW WHITE LIGHTS. LIT MARQUEES. Automated billboards. Sparkling colored bulbs. From 53rd Street down to 42nd Street and into Times Square, these electric beacons enticed thrill-seekers and art-lovers, gourmets and cocktail scholars to the theaters, nightclubs, restaurants, and lounges of Broadway. For decades, this dazzling street had been called the Great White Way, and on the last day of 1941—New Year's Eve—it was as bright and bustling as ever.

But America was at war now. Soon the Great White Way would grow dim, blacked out as a precaution against enemy air raids. For years this cultural capital of the United States would throw itself into all the confusion, sacrifice, and patriotic spirit of the war effort. On its stages, barstools, and street corners, denizens, tourists, military men, and folks who made their living serving up the night life were already asking the same question: Could Broadway survive the war?

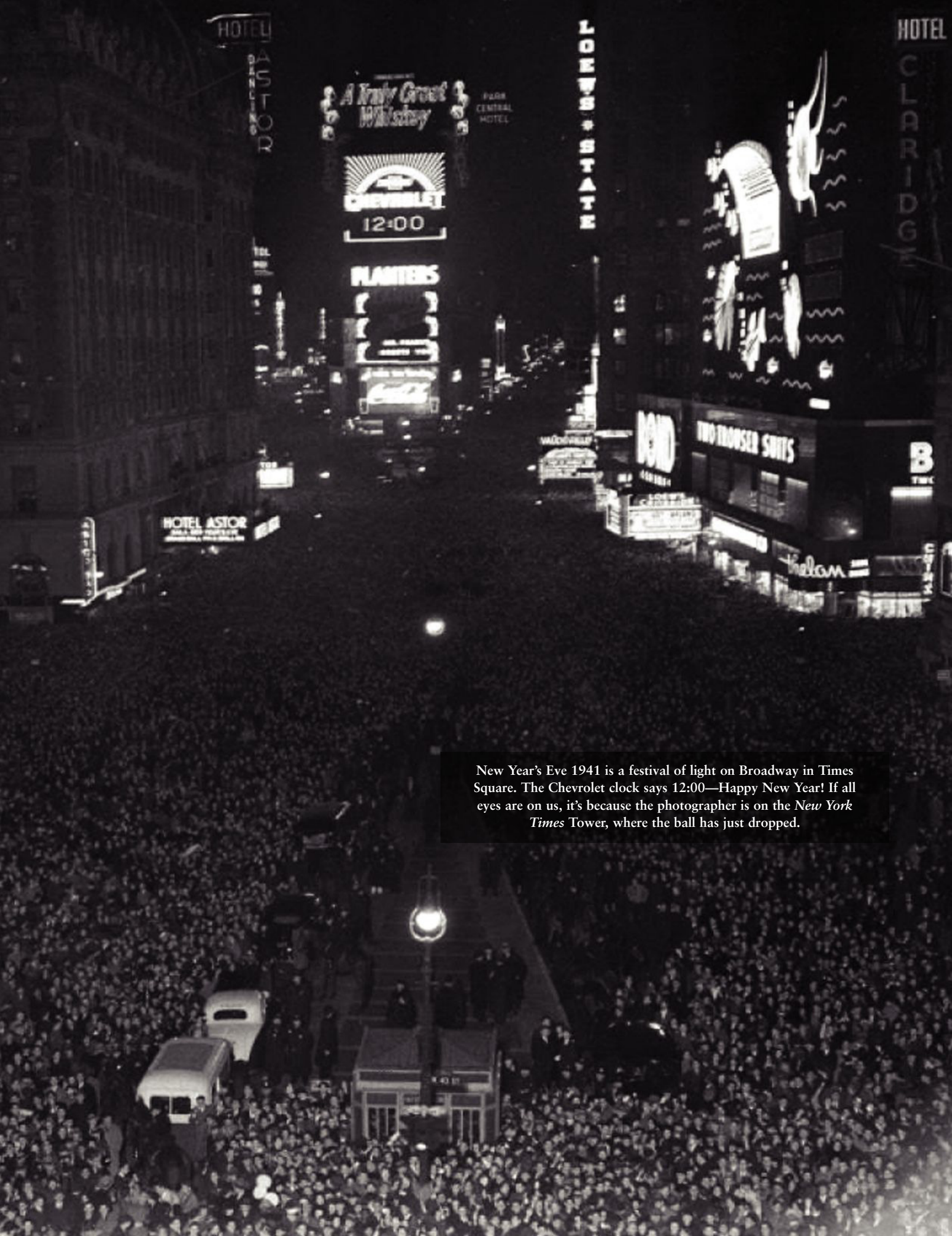
Mayor Fiorello La Guardia always laughed that question off. A spirited leader who played to New York City's cocky self-image, he told anyone who'd listen that New Yorkers could do anything, and with one arm tied behind their backs. But as he patrolled Broadway and environs that New Year's Eve with police commissioner Lewis Valentine, La Guardia really wasn't sure. In fact, he was bitten through with worry.

La Guardia knew what was coming that night. As Broadway's theaters let out, show-goers would join the crowd streaming into Times Square. There, hordes of servicemen on passes and their dates, lounge couples in fancy dress, and New Yorkers in party hats would gather around the *New York Times* Tower. At midnight, an illuminated ball would drop down a pole, officially opening the new year. It would be an absolute festival of light.

That's what worried La Guardia. In addition to being mayor of New York, he was also director of the US Office of Civil Defense, personally appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt. Through briefings and study, he knew the New Year's Eve party in Times



NATIONAL ARCHIVES



New Year's Eve 1941 is a festival of light on Broadway in Times Square. The Chevrolet clock says 12:00—Happy New Year! If all eyes are on us, it's because the photographer is on the *New York Times* Tower, where the ball has just dropped.

BROADWAY dims its lights...slightly by John E. Stanchak

Square wasn't just a celebration. It was also a target, an invitation for enemy aircraft to strike an emotionally crippling blow to the city, killing thousands with bombs. No one in the national government could assure him the worst wouldn't happen. But La Guardia knew that after only three weeks of declared war, canceling New Year's Eve and turning off Broadway would send a bad message to the world: New York was shutting down in fear.

So La Guardia gambled. He knew he'd be putting New York on harder war footing in just weeks, but for the moment, the city would put on a tough face for any doubters. For safety that night, La Guardia smothered Times Square and its surrounds with 2,000 policemen, pulled every available piece of firefighting equipment to the area, and unleashed 1,600 air raid wardens to blanket it.

NO AXIS BOMBS FELL on Broadway that night. But the question remained: Could Broadway, in all its electric, extravagant glory, survive a prolonged war and all its austerity and other hardships? It was a question of economics. All along the Great White Way, producers, restaurateurs, and club owners wondered how they'd get along when blackouts began—and once most of the able actors, stagehands, and musicians were in uniform, paint for sets was hard to get, food and liquor were rationed, and transportation was restricted. And where would they find customers in the middle of a war?

That last question was the easiest to answer: the US government would deliver customers directly to their doors. Over the four years of war, millions of service men and women would be transported through New York City. Many thousands would be stationed there, adding to the swelling temporary wartime population. Uniformed personnel attended shows, hit the nightclubs, and took dates to restaurants. Allied servicemen from other nations were also sprinkled into the mix, along with thousands of civilians temporarily relocated from Europe. Contractors and government workers from across the country passed through the city on war business or temporarily settled there.

All those people wanted Broadway. They wanted the scenes described by syndicated columnist Walter Winchell from his headquarters at the upscale Stork Club at 3 East 53rd Street. They wanted the Broadway celebrated by celebrities and regular guys at

Toots Shor's famous saloon at 51 West 51st Street—the Broadway that welcomed sailors and soldiers at the Stage Door Canteen in the basement of the 44th Street Theater and was home to the renowned Lindy's deli between 49th and 50th streets, where newsmen, show-business regulars, and gangsters hung out.

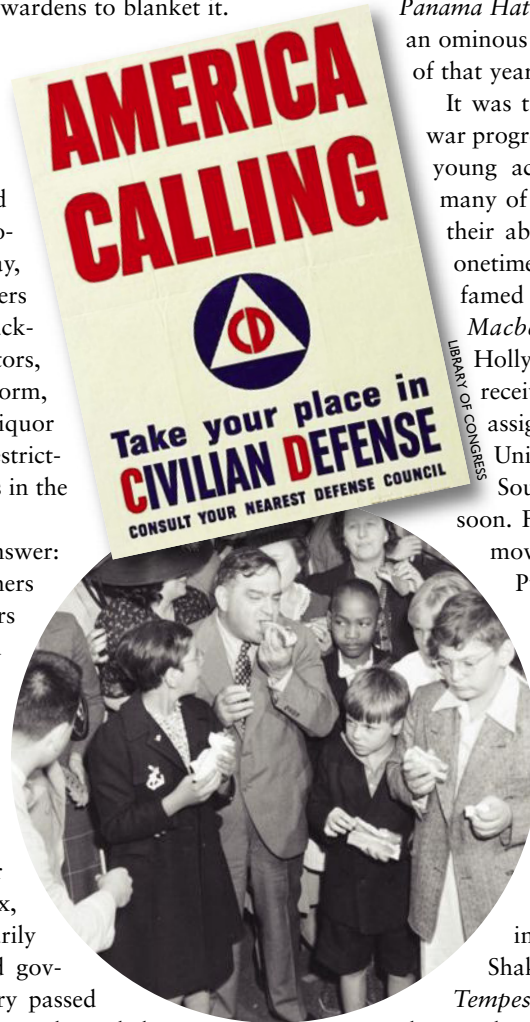
The wartime crowd also wanted to see stars and great entertainment, and they did that year after year. On the tense New Year's Eve of 1941, for instance, the hot tickets were for Vincent Price in the Gothic mystery *Angel Street* (later remade into the enduring film *Gaslight*), Boris Karloff in the comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*, British sophisticate Noel Coward's light-hearted ghost story *Blithe Spirit*, Ethel Merman in Cole Porter's frothy musical *Panama Hattie*, and playwright Lillian Hellman's tale of an ominous Fascist threat, *Watch on the Rhine*, winner of that year's New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

It was tough for the theaters to keep going as the war progressed. They needed talent, but many healthy young actors were drafted into the military, and many of the best playwrights and producers turned their abilities to war work. The Theater District's onetime wonder boy Orson Welles, creator of famed and innovative Broadway productions of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, had gone to Hollywood shortly before the war. There he received a draft deferment and a government assignment to create a film supporting the United States' Good Neighbor policy toward South America. He wouldn't be back anytime soon. Famed playwright Eugene O'Neill had also moved to California and was in poor health.

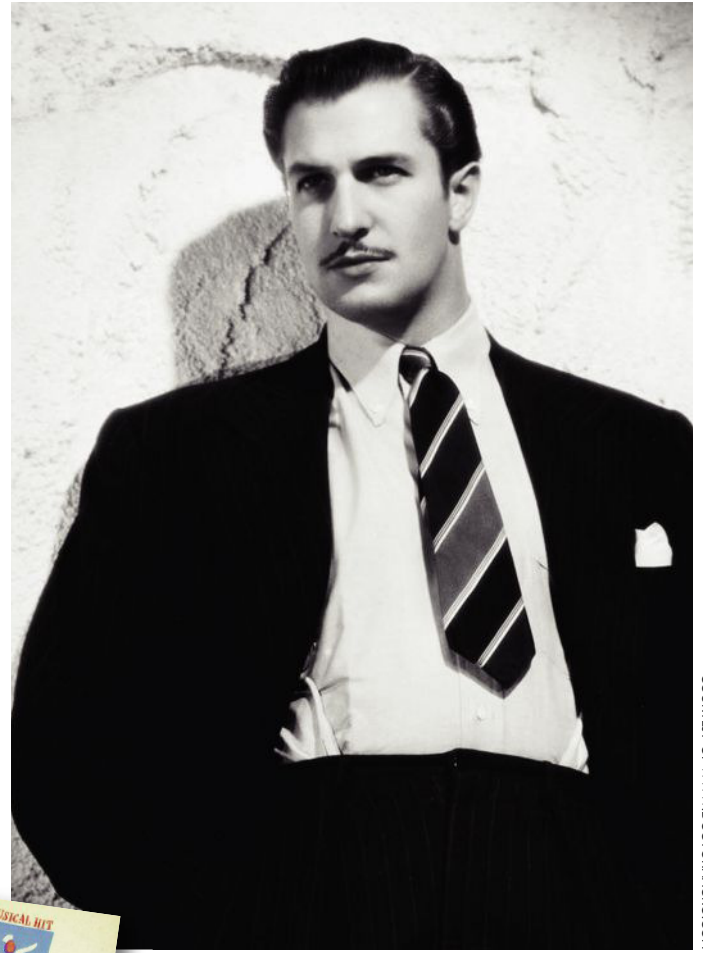
Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist Robert E. Sherwood was dragooned into service as a speechwriter for Roosevelt (he was credited with creating the phrase "arsenal of democracy") and then became a director of the US Office of War Information.

To help keep theater seats filled, producers fell back on the classics and the work of older, established actors. Famed African American singer, political activist, and performer Paul Robeson packed them in during a long-running production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The Bard's *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *Richard III* also had Broadway runs

during the war years. Old favorites *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder and *Porgy and Bess* by George and Ira Gershwin were revived. George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Anton Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Gilbert and Sullivan's venerable musical treats *Pirates of Penzance* and *Ruddigore* all got new productions.

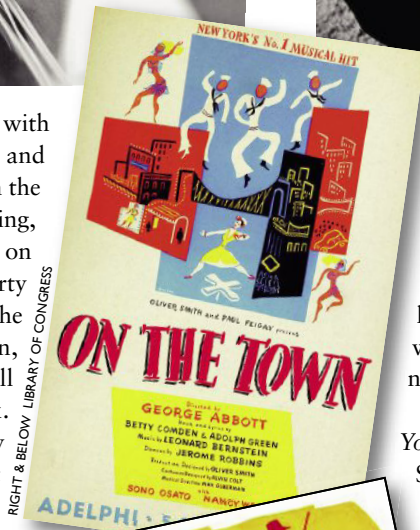


The trouble with a bright New Year's Eve was that America was at war. Lights were potential targets for enemy planes. Above: New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia (eating a hot dog with kids) had to keep his city—and Broadway, its heart—running. Top: But he was also US head of Civil Defense, tasked with home-front safety. Clearly, Broadway had to go dim. Could it survive that, especially with so many Theater District men off at war? Opposite: An influx of servicemen passing through New York and war workers, all hungry for nightlife, would save the day—drawn by stars like Ethel Merman (top left) and Vincent Price (top right) and by new shows (bottom) like *On the Town* and *Oklahoma!*.



While people in show business wrestled with their own unique problems, nightclub and lounge owners struggled with others. With the coming of war, whether you were dancing, watching a movie, or listening to a comic on a club stage, in New York City your party was over at 12 o'clock. James Byrnes, the nation's director of war mobilization, declared a midnight shutdown on all amusements. You couldn't get a drink. Club and bar owners howled that they were being driven out of business. But tough-guy Broadway saloonkeeper Toots Shor got everybody laughing when he supported the government, saying, "Any crumb what can't get plastered by midnight just ain't tryin'."

TO CUT DOWN ON the Great White Way's potential as an air raid target, every other street light in the city from Washington Heights down to the Battery was turned off. The lights that remained on were dimmed. Traffic lights were covered with metal hoods that allowed only a glimpse of the signal's color through a thin slit. On April 28, 1942, Times Square's famous bright novelty billboards were turned off for the duration of the war.



Two days later there was a total blackout of Times Square and Broadway. Huge crowds gathered there to see the city in complete darkness for the first time. This annoyed La Guardia, who insisted that everyone remain indoors and under cover during blackouts. He pointed out that the first night of the Blitz in London had produced large civilian casualties because citizens went outdoors to look up at the Nazi aircraft in the night sky.

In Times Square, around the fourth floor of the *New York Times* Tower was something called "the zipper." Since 1928, it had spelled out a continuous string of news headlines to New Yorkers below, using electric lights. At midnight on May 18, 1942, it spelled out "The New York Times bids you goodnight" and then went dark. In Lorraine B. Diehl's history *Over Here! New York City during World War II*, one of the electricians who ran the zipper is quoted as saying, "All I want is to start it up again the night Hitler gets killed. That would tickle me to death."

Meanwhile, in dim light or near darkness, the party went on every night from 5 to 12 at Broadway's Stage Door Canteen. With a capacity of 500, it offered military men every night-club feature except alcohol, all for free. There the era's most popular big bands played, famed actors and actresses served snacks to

BROADWAY dims its lights...slightly by John E. Stanchak

soldiers and sailors, entertainers performed their best bits on stage, and young women volunteers in striped aprons danced and chatted with servicemen. The canteen was a charitable project run by the American Theater Wing, an organization supported by Broadway theater professionals.

The Stage Door Canteen became almost instantly famous across the nation. It spawned the Hollywood Canteen in Los An-

geles, inspired movies, and prompted the opening of similar canteens in several large cities, including a branch in London, England, where visitors might have found popular singer Bing Crosby offering up a few tunes or Broadway great Tallulah Bankhead leading a conga line.

In 1944, 19-year-old vixen Lauren Bacall made her smashing movie debut opposite Humphrey Bogart in the wartime adventure

Harvey's Poison-Tongued Pal

WHEN THE COMEDY *Harvey* opened on Broadway in 1944, it was an instant hit. For the star, Frank Fay, it was a chance for a career comeback. Fay portrayed Elwood P. Dowd, a gentle and bemused dipsomaniac who believes he's accompanied by a drinking buddy, an invisible 6-foot, 3-inch rabbit named Harvey. The story follows Dowd's family and associates as they try to commit him to a mental hospital while quietly struggling with their own suspicions that Harvey may be real.

Politics, the war, and home-front life and its concerns never come up in *Harvey*. The play merely has sport with the preposterous. In the middle of the era's darkest moments, the public embraced it as unadulterated fun and pure relief. Its author, Mary Chase, received the Pulitzer Prize.

What the public did not know was something everyone in show business privately acknowledged: Frank Fay was the most despised man in the entertainment industry. Born in the 1890s, Fay was one of the founders of stand-up comedy and invented the master of ceremonies role as it is known today. In his youth, stage comics wore silly costumes, worked with partners, and performed memorized routines. Fay became a vaudeville star because he did away with all that. He stood onstage in a tuxedo telling jokes and funny stories without all the grease-paint and slapstick.

Fay became so popular and successful during the 1920s that he played New York City's Palace Theater, vaudeville's premier venue, for the astounding sum of \$1,800 a week. Then-rookie comedians Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Milton Berle, and many others studied his content and delivery and copied his style. Fay's celebrity allowed him to date a wide array of women and he eventually wooed and married future movie great Barbara Stanwyck. When talking motion pictures made the scene, Hollywood studios pursued him.

Fay's rise crested in the early 1930s. Then his career started a downhill slide. His movies weren't that successful, and his bride, Stanwyck, surpassed him in popularity. Then job offers started drying up because show business executives from New York to California discovered what Fay's fellow performers already knew: he was an unbearable egocentric, a wife-beater, and a loathsome anti-Semite.

In one famous show-business insider story from that time, Fay noticed young performer Milton Berle watching his act offstage and told theater hands "to get that little Jew bastard out of the wings."

On hearing that, Berle waited for him to exit, then clobbered him with a piece of wood. In Los Angeles, the inside-the-business joke became "Question: Which Hollywood actor has the biggest pr*ck? Answer: Barbara Stanwyck."

Stanwyck dropped Fay in an ugly public divorce, and he was slowly reduced to occasional radio work. He was rescued from the show business dustbin by Broadway director Antoinette Perry when she cast him in *Harvey*. The play ran for more than 1,800 performances and paid Fay well. But he just wouldn't keep his mouth shut.

A staunch Irish Roman Catholic, a virulent anti-Communist, and friend of controversial ultra-conservative political radio commentator Father Charles Coughlin (a supporter of Fascism before Pearl Harbor), Fay cut loose with opinions in World War II's last days. Following the peace, things hit bottom when Fay suggested that the House Un-American Activities Committee investigate members of the Actors'

Equity Association—the labor union for the performers and others working in live theater—for supporting a campaign to aid Spanish political refugees fleeing from Fascist dictator Francisco Franco's regime and his supporters in Spain's Catholic Church.

Fay claimed the Actors' Equity campaign was anti-Catholic. The union said it was simply anti-Fascist. Far-right-wing extremists, former German American Bund (Nazi Party) members, Ku Klux Klansmen, and assorted cranks publicly rushed to Fay's support. To people across America who had just given so much to defeat Fascists, Nazis, and imperialists, this was too much too soon. To them, Franco was a jerk and an old pal of Adolf Hitler.

But Fay and his associates paid no heed. In 1946, his radical far-right supporters held a rally at Madison Square Garden under a banner that read "The Friends of Frank Fay." That drove the last nail into the coffin of his career.

Harvey's bright and affirmative reputation was rescued when popular film actor and WWII combat bomber pilot Jimmy Stewart briefly replaced Fay in the part of Elwood P. Dowd. Stewart proved more popular in the role than the bitter old comic had been. Meanwhile, Fay lost his table at the iconic New York show business eatery Lindy's, and Actors' Equity censured him for "conduct prejudicial to the association or its membership."

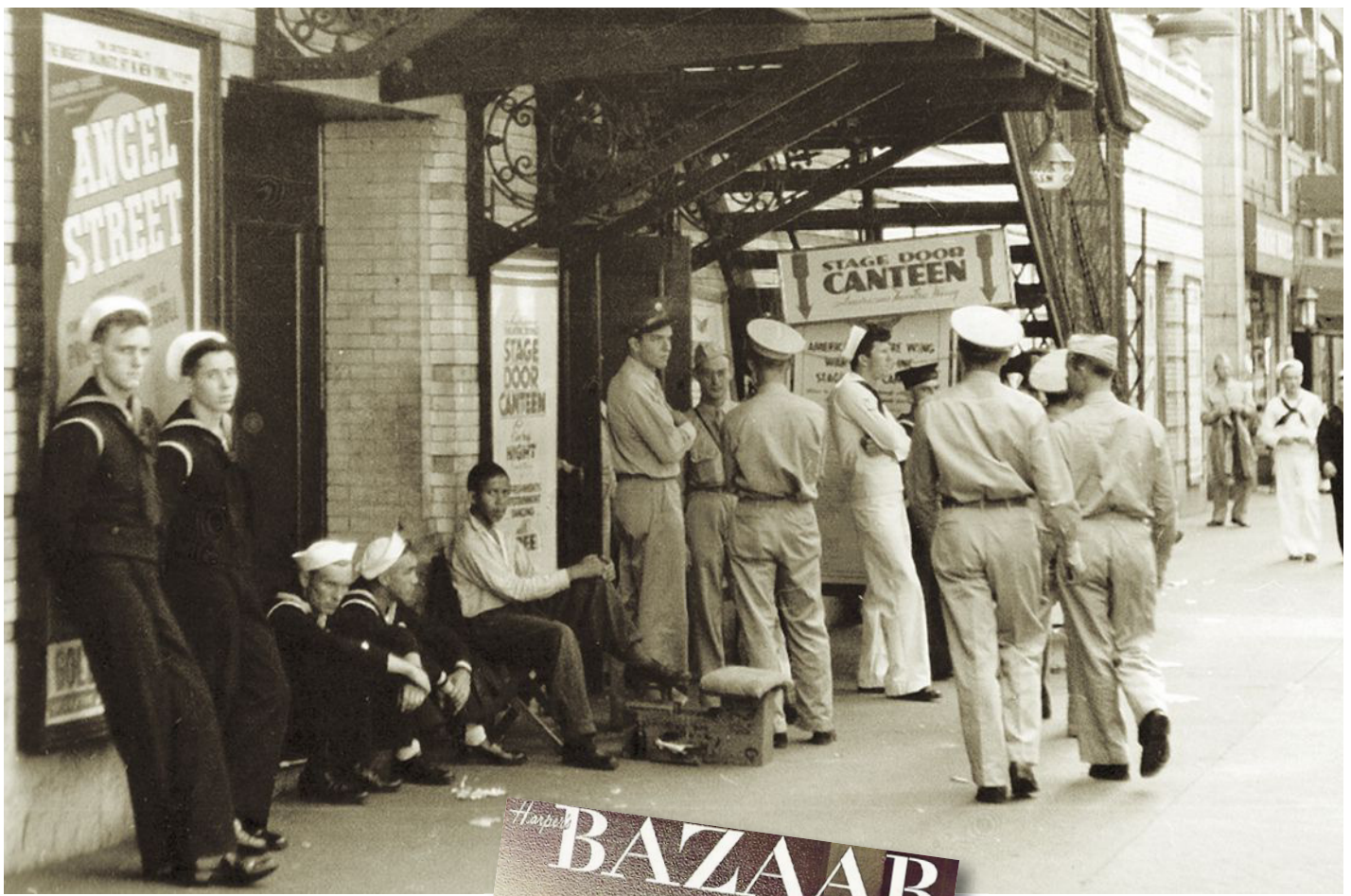
Fay was a true entertainment pioneer. But when he died in 1961, he was largely forgotten.

JOHN STANCHAK



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Above: Barbara Stanwyck wed Frank Fay in 1928. But they fought often and Fay reportedly got violent at times. They split in 1935.



To Have and Have Not. But before that, she was a precocious teenage fashion model and stage-struck Broadway wannabe. Between working as a theater usher, hunting autographs, and going on rounds of auditions, she found time to volunteer as a Stage Door Canteen girl at its opening in 1942. In her 1978 autobiography *Lauren Bacall by Myself*, she wrote,

The Stage Door Canteen was about to open in New York and it needed hostesses. Only theatre folk qualified. I signed up for Monday nights. I was to dance with any soldier, sailor, or marine who asked—get drinks or coffee for them, listen to their stories. Many of them had girls at home—were homesick—would transfer their affections to one of us out of loneliness and need. Some would come every Monday night to see the same girl. It was really very sweet and sad and fun, a natural set-up for a dreamer. There was always music, and stars would appear each night to entertain or talk to the boys from the small stage. My first night there I couldn't believe it—Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were washing dishes and serving coffee. Helen Hayes too....



On Monday nights there was fierce jitterbugging. Many a time I found myself in the middle of a circle—everyone clapping to the music—while I was whirled and twirled by one guy, then passed on to another, non-stop, until I thought I would drop. Judy Garland and Johnny Mercer came in one night and sang some of Mercer's songs....

TROOPS ON LEAVE in the city often received free tickets to plays and movies. Many servicemen got to see Broadway shows for the first and perhaps only time in their lives. And once the Theater District adjusted to wartime's challenges, some of the shows the GIs got to see were groundbreaking, history-making productions. There was John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down*, *The Skin of our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder, and Irving Berlin's *This Is the Army*. John Hersey's *Bell for Adano* opened on Broadway during the war, as did the John Van Druten feel-good melodrama *I Remember Mama*, the comedy *Harvey* by Mary Chase, and Tennessee Williams's pioneering drama *The Glass Menagerie*. The musicals *On the Town*, *Oklahoma!*, and

Top: Assorted servicemen—and an enterprising shoe-shiner—cluster around the entrance to Broadway's Stage Door Canteen. There, military personnel could rub elbows with stars and take in live entertainment, all for free. The only thing absent was alcohol. Above: On the March 1943 cover of *Harper's Bazaar* magazine, actress Lauren Bacall somehow makes wartime blood donation seem glamorous.



Boris Karloff (right), famous for his film role as Frankenstein's monster, plays Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* on Broadway. The comedy ran for more than 1,440 performances from 1941 to 1944. Karloff's character was a killer whose identity-changing plastic surgery left him looking like...Boris Karloff.

BROADWAY dims its lights...slightly by John E. Stanchak

Carousel all premiered to home-front audiences.

Reputations were made in Broadway's war years. Actor Montgomery Clift would be remembered as one of the most talented movie heartthrobs of the late 1940s and 1950s. He made his theater debut at age 15. Because of a draft deferment in 1942 due to colitis, he found himself one of a small circle of young men available for work on stage and landed a role in that year's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Working alongside veteran actors Frederic March and Tallulah Bankhead, he won the notice that put him on the road to Hollywood.

Leonard Bernstein was a 25-year-old *cum laude* graduate of Harvard working as the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's conducting assistant in November 1943. An orchestra performance led by famed conductor Bruno Walter was to be

On wartime Broadway, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II reinvented American musical theater right before the eyes of housewives, mature couples, and servicemen passing through New York. Their 1943 production *Oklahoma!* and 1945 hit *Carousel* combined detailed plots with accompanying musical numbers in a way that had rarely been seen before. The shows released fistfuls of hits that kept war-era New Yorkers singing through to V-J Day: "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," "Surrey with the Fringe on Top," "Oklahoma," "If I Loved You," and "You'll Never Walk Alone."

IN THE END, the worrisome question from December 1941—"Could Broadway survive the war?"—was answered when *Yank: The Army Weekly*, a tabloid distributed to all GIs, polled show business industry newspapers in the last days of the

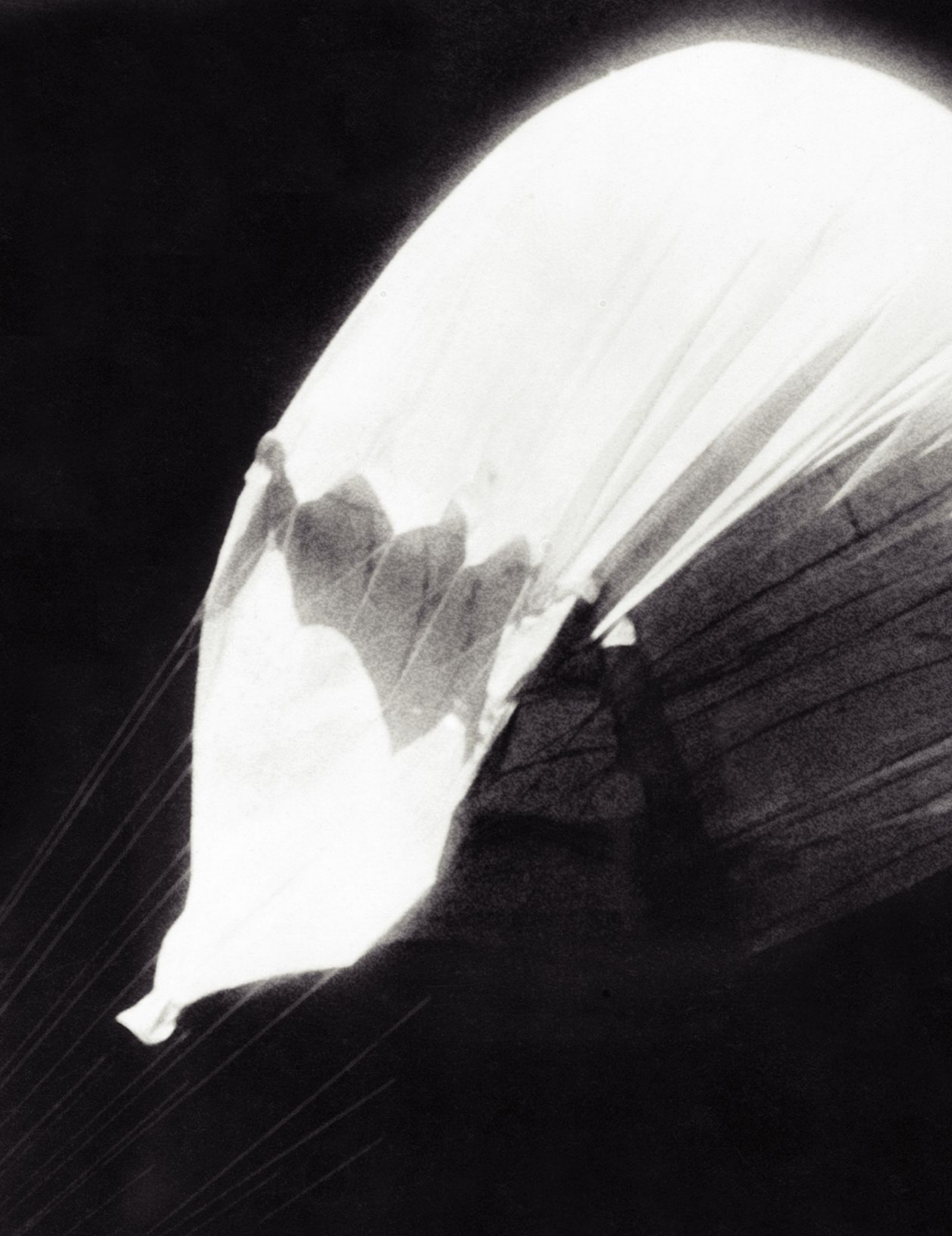


Airmen in Times Square, 1944 (from left): Pennsylvanian Bill Kushlan, Mississippian George Bradford, Pennsylvanian E.P. Kubisiak, and Hendrickson, a Kentuckian. Inset: At the Stork Club, said Kushlan, they saw the prices and "thought we'd better get out of there." The coin was free.

broadcast live nationwide on radio when, at the last minute, he fell ill. Bernstein took his place and was an instant sensation. That led to a partnership with lyricists Betty Comden and Adolf Green that resulted in the December 1944 Broadway premiere of the thunderously popular story of three singing sailors on leave in Manhattan, *On the Town*, remembered for the song that goes "New York, New York, a helluva town / The Bronx is up but the Battery's down / The people ride around in a hole in the ground...." Called America's first native classical conducting talent, Bernstein became a US cultural icon for the remainder of the 20th century, best remembered for writing the 1950s musical *West Side Story*.

war. *Yank* tallied up the productions and stood dumbfounded by the profits. In the last full year of the war, Broadway had seen "41 comedies, 30 straight dramas, 25 musicals, four melodramas, one farce, three spectacles, and two variety shows." Show business's reputation as a bad investment was temporarily put to rest. Some shows had made a little money. Others were more like *Arsenic and Old Lace*, which, after 1,440 performances, had generated a fine wartime profit of \$4 million. Broadway had come through the crisis in fine fashion. ★

JOHN E. STANCHAK of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, writes frequently for America in WWII on politics, show biz, and pop culture.





attack of the KILLER BALLOONS

Giant, gas-filled paper globes drifted serenely across the Pacific in 1945, on their way to terrorize the United States with random bomb strikes.

by **Bruce Heydt**

PASTOR ARCHIE MITCHELL PARKED HIS LOADED CAR along a road in the southern hills of Oregon on May 5, 1945. While he unloaded fishing gear and picnic fare, his wife and children and several other youngsters from his Christian Alliance Church of Bly, Oregon, got out and went ahead to find a spot to settle down. Moments later, 11-year-old Joan Patzke yelled out to the others. She said she had found a strange-looking white balloon. Some of the others gathered around. One apparently tugged curiously at the mysterious object. *Bang!* Mrs. Mitchell and Patzke and four other children were killed instantly.

A few months earlier, a similar device had been discovered near Kalispell, Montana. Had Mrs. Mitchell known about that incident, she might have been more cautious. But the Federal Bureau of Investigation had covered up the news for a few weeks. When the bureau finally lifted its fog, the story went public in a brief buried in the January 1, 1945, issue of *Newsweek*. Most Americans never noticed it. Under the heading “Balloon Mystery,” the magazine reported:

In a snow-covered, heavily forested area southwest of the Montana town, two woodchoppers found a balloon with Japanese markings on it. Made of processed paper, the 33 1/2-foot bag bore on its side a small incendiary bomb, apparently designed to explode and prevent seizure of the balloon intact. Also attached were 45-foot rope cables, roughly hacked as if to show that the balloon’s gondola had been purposely severed.

Some of the suppositions about the mystery balloon would eventually prove wrong. In fact, the unnamed *Newsweek* reporter admitted the discovery raised more questions than could then be answered. Had the balloon carried any passengers? If so, where were they? Where

A Japanese Fu-Go, or balloon bomb, drifts over the Pacific Ocean toward the United States sometime in 1945—a “gift” of potential random destruction from Axis Japan. This one will do no harm; it is being followed by an American Bell P-63 King-Cobra fighter, which snapped this photograph.

attack of the **KILLER BALLOONS** by Bruce Heydt

were the parachutes or the gondola by which they might have descended? Had the balloon come from an enemy submarine operating off the West Coast, or had it been flown all the way from Japan?

Answers to all these questions became tragically apparent in the months that followed. When Mrs. Mitchell and the five children were killed in Oregon, the War Department clamped a lid on the story while it assessed how much of a threat the balloon bombs really were. But with the approach of summer and the likelihood that schoolchildren enjoying their summer vacations would soon be flocking to parks and other outdoor recreational spots up and down the West Coast, the department finally gave the okay for Pastor Mitchell to talk about his horrific experience as a warning to others who might accidentally stumble across a similar device.

The War Department continued to reassess the danger as more facts surfaced. “The Japanese have for some time been sending over unmanned balloons, carrying explosives, to land in western North America,” it announced at one point. “Though no property damage had been done, there was such a chance of personal danger to unsuspecting civilians that the War and Navy Departments felt compelled to warn the public.”

The use of such an unlikely method for carrying the war to the American mainland revealed how desperately wartime Japan craved to strike her enemy’s home. The balloon bombs clearly had limited, if any, strategic value. Prior to December 7, 1941, the prevailing wisdom among the Japanese had held that no American bomb would ever fall on their sacred soil. The Doolittle Raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942, dispelled that prewar hubris. In an attack that had mostly symbolic value, Lieutenant Colonel James

Doolittle’s squadron of 16 B-25B medium bombers had peppered Tokyo with 16 tons of bombs—a very modest effort that led Japanese punsters with a grasp of the English language to dub it the Do-Nothing Raid. As the war rolled on into 1943 and beyond, however, the Japanese home islands became ever more vulnerable. The fall of the islands Tinian, Saipan, and Guam in 1944 ultimately brought Japan within range of American B-29 heavy bombers, which was no laughing matter.

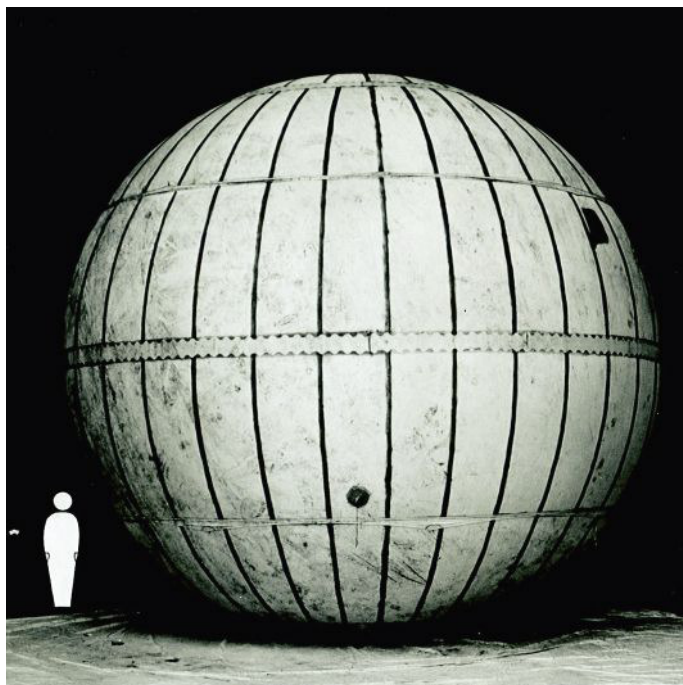
Japan kept trying to develop a conventional attack aircraft capable of taking the war from within its shrinking empire to the American homeland, but failed. Nevertheless, national morale and honor required retaliation for the American bomb raids, even if it meant turning to unconventional means.

Back in the 1930s, the Japanese Military Scientific Laboratory had conceived of an unmanned, lighter-than-air balloon that would carry a bomb. With a range of only about 70 miles, however, the weapon officially designated *Fu-Go* (“wind-ship weapon” or “balloon weapon”) offered little potential for use against an offshore enemy. The *Fu-Go* never went into production, but the idea of balloon-borne bombs never entirely faded.

Military aviation historian Robert C. Mikesh writes that, as early as 1942 (which again suggests a reaction to the Doolittle Raid), the Japanese began investigating the practicality of using the prevailing westerly winds over the northern Pacific Ocean to carry unmanned balloons all the way to North America. In his book *Japan’s World War II Balloon Bomb Attacks on North America*, Mikesh reports that the Japanese found that a balloon would probably cover the 6,200-mile distance to the West Coast of North America in 50 to 70 hours when released at a high alti-



ALL IMAGES THIS STORY: NATIONAL ARCHIVES



tude over Japan. But along the way it would face variable air pressures and temperatures that could destroy it.

Hydrogen expands at higher daytime temperatures, thereby increasing a balloon's buoyancy but also raising the pressure inside it. To keep their balloons from bursting, the Japanese designers engineered a release valve to bleed off hydrogen when pressure exceeded a preset limit or when a balloon ascended above 38,000 feet. The loss of gas would reduce buoyancy and cause the balloon to descend to a safer altitude. Conversely, when lower nighttime temperatures cooled the hydrogen and the pressure dropped below a certain level—or whenever a balloon dropped below about 29,500 feet—an altimeter would activate a mechanism to release a pair of the 32 sandbags the typical balloon carried. Thus lightened, the balloon would slowly ascend. By means of these automatic devices, the balloon bombs would bob up and down in the atmosphere within a fairly regular range of altitudes throughout their flights.

A balloon bomb would carry enough ballast for a three-day flight, by which time it should have arrived over America. By then, with less hydrogen left to keep it aloft, the balloon would start descending, especially when exposed to coolness. But having already released all its ballast, it would no longer be able to rise by dropping weight, and would soon sink below 27,000 feet. When this happened, the two incendiary bombs and single anti-personnel bomb it carried would be released. Finally, a fuse would ignite and burn for about 80 minutes before setting off a gunpowder charge to destroy the balloon, keeping its secrets out of American hands.

Unlike the secret weapon the United States was developing—the atomic bomb—the balloon bomb was a low-tech solution that depended on no major technological breakthroughs or sophisti-

cated manufacturing infrastructure. It was a simple weapon for a nation whose industry was already under continual attack. In fact, once the basic design had been hammered out, the balloons themselves were manufactured not by research scientists but by Japanese schoolchildren. One of these was 15-year-old Tanaka Tetsuko, a student in Yamaguchi Girls' High School. Tanaka, part of the so-called Student Special Attack Force, told her story of making balloon bombs to Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore Cook for their book *Japan at War: An Oral History*:

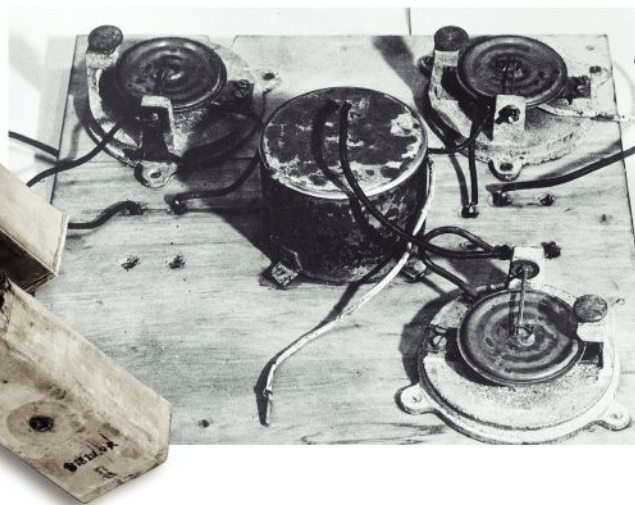
In 1944 an army officer from the military arsenal in Kokura on Kyushu came to our school and told us that we would be making a "secret weapon." The weapon would have a great impact on the war. He didn't say then that we would be making balloon bombs, only that somehow what we made would fly to America. A factory started at our school in August 1944. Stands were placed all over the schoolyard and drying boards were erected on them.... We covered the board with a thin layer of paste...and then laid down two sheets of Japanese paper and brushed out any bubbles. When dry, a thicker layer of paste, with a slightly bluish hue, a little like the color of the sky, was evenly applied to it. That process was repeated five times. We really believed we were doing secret work, so I didn't talk about this even at home, but my clothes were covered with paste, so my family must have been able to figure out something.

Despite what Tanaka was told, it seems evident that this so-called secret project was never intended to be truly covert, but was rather a scheme designed primarily to boost Japanese civilian morale by making the people believe they were playing an active role in defeating the enemy.

Opposite: Military and civilian officials examine the same balloon shown on the previous spread, downed harmlessly in California. Now the study of Japan's deceptively peaceful-looking and usually ineffective secret weapon will begin. Above, left: Disarmed but re-inflated, a balloon bomb recovered at sea on April 23, 1945, is put into scale by a human size indicator applied to the photograph.

Above, right: A sailor shows the same balloon's inflation and venting valve.

attack of the **KILLER BALLOONS** by Bruce Heydt



Left: In a filmed demonstration, a fuse burns to jettison ballast from a captured balloon bomb—a process triggered by drops in hydrogen pressure or altitude. Inset: Each balloon carried a demolition block (seen with its paper cover) for the balloon's final destruction. Above: The nerve center of each balloon was its altimeter, which triggered the release of ballast or the venting of hydrogen, and detonated the demolition block. Opposite: A fully inflated and assembled captured Fu-Go stands tethered at a US base.

If Doolittle's 1942 attack drew derision as the Do-Nothing Raid, the Japanese counterpunch only paled by comparison. Japanese officials interviewed after the war revealed that their hope had been that Tanaka and her peers in several other schools who were drafted into the program would produce upwards of 120,000 balloons for the military to set adrift in the jet stream. By war's end, however, only 9,000 had been launched.

THE FATE OF MOST OF THESE DEVICES is uncertain. Many carried radio transmitters so their progress across the ocean could be tracked, but the information collected was ambiguous. A loss of signal could mean a balloon had successfully delivered its payload and then self-destructed or that it had lost pressure and slowly descended into the ocean—or that it had been intercepted and shot down. US press reports of landings could have helped the tracking effort, but the War Department censored that information so the Japanese could not easily obtain a running count of how many balloons reached the States. The censorship also deprived the Japanese of details that might have allowed them to refine their balloon operations.

Historian Mikesh's study of official reports yielded 285 documented incidents involving balloon bombs over North America, including a handful as far east as Iowa. Almost all the reports involved nothing more than the discovery of fragments of balloons, ballasts, valves, and other pieces, including quite a few unexploded bombs. Several reported incidents ended with one or more balloons being shot down. Given the fragmentary nature of most of the discovered wreckage, it's reasonable to assume that many of the findings were the scattered remains of a single balloon. All this considered, it's likely that about 200 to 250 balloons actually passed over the West Coast and continued eastward.

That many balloons would have carried a rough total of 11 tons of explosives—two-thirds of the weight the Doolittle raiders dropped on Tokyo. The damage caused by those payloads, though, bears no comparison. The only known casualties caused by the balloon offensive were the six picnickers on Pastor Mitchell's ill-fated outing. A few small fires were started in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, but there was no significant damage.

For Tanaka Tetsuko, who had once been so proud to serve her country as a member of the Student Special Attack Force, discovering the truth of the balloon bomb project put a shameful twist on the memories of her unusual schoolyard adventure. "We only learned some forty years later that the balloon bombs we made had actually reached America," she said. "They started a few forest fires and inflicted some casualties, among them children. Five children and a woman on a picnic in Oregon in May 1945 when a bomb dropped earlier exploded. When I heard that, I was stunned. I made those weapons.... Some of us got together and felt we would like to organize an effort to apologize. I started with my classmates, but encountered strong resistance...."

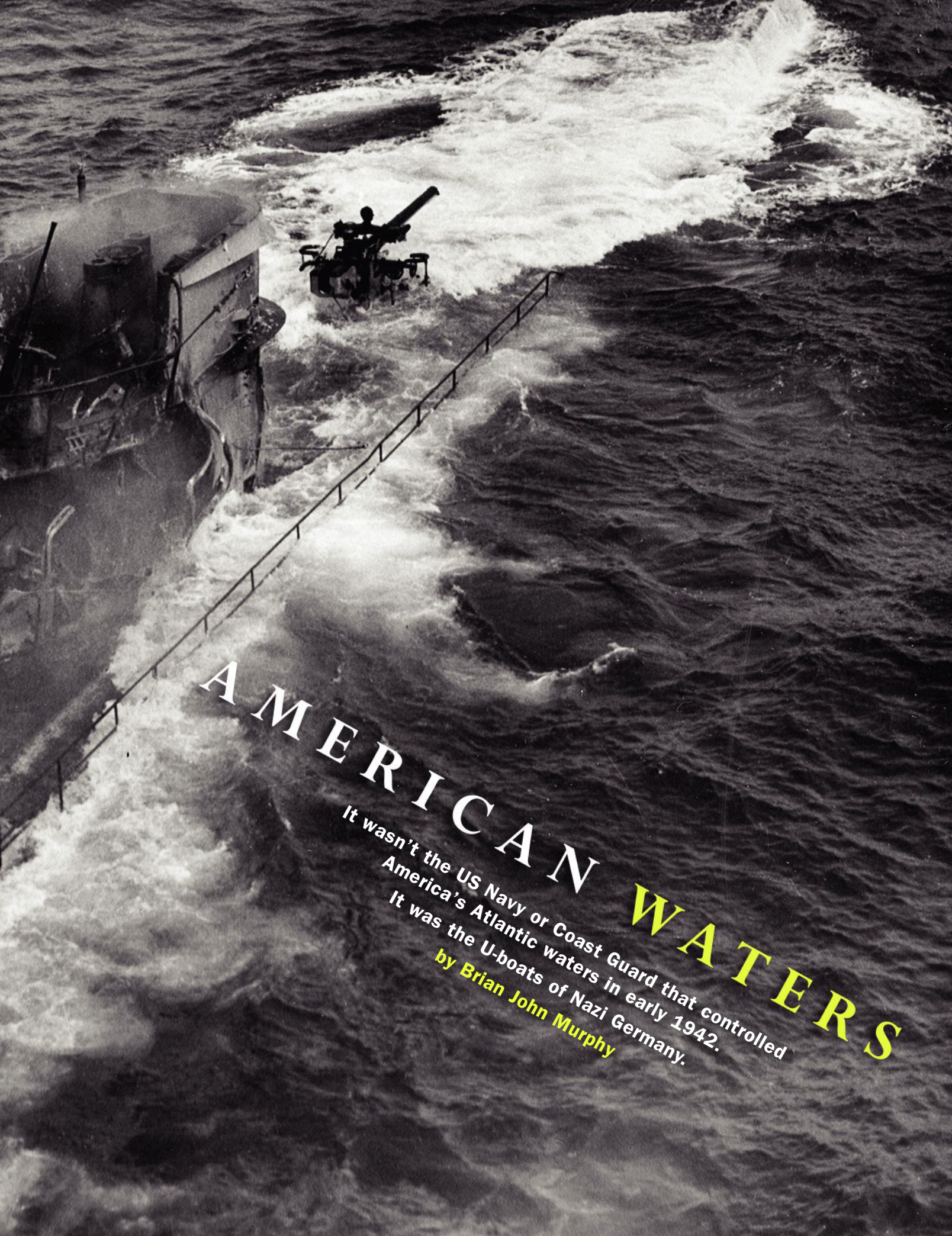
Compared with the horrors wrought by more effective methods of warfare, Tanaka found, most people figured that apologizing for something as trivial as this was unwarranted. Though some Japanese did travel to the United States in later years to apologize for the balloon bombings, most wanted simply to forget. And as time went on, they pretty much did. On both sides of the Pacific, the former enemies moved on, and one of the war's stranger offensives became an obscure, if remarkable, piece of historical trivia. ★

BRUCE HEYDT is a free-lance writer and former magazine editor based in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County.



SHARKS IN





AMERICAN WATERS

It wasn't the US Navy or Coast Guard that controlled
America's Atlantic waters in early 1942.
It was the U-boats of Nazi Germany.

by **Brian John Murphy**

SHARKS IN AMERICAN WATERS by Brian John Murphy

IT WAS A BONE-CHILLING JANUARY NIGHT for the men on the conning tower of *U-123*. The skipper, Lieutenant Captain Reinhard Hardegen, peered through high-powered Zeiss binoculars at a huge glow on the northwest horizon. Hardegen and his crew on the tower were the only German fighting men to see this sight since hostilities had begun a few weeks back, in December 1941—the lights of New York City. *U-123* was the first German submarine—the first of many—to go hunting in American waters in World War II.

For seven months, from mid-January to early August 1942, German U-boats would take control of America's East Coast waters, sinking freighters and oil and gasoline tankers—anything and everything steaming off the coast. Ship by sinking ship, the Nazis achieved a victory over the United States comparable to and even *more* devastating than the one the Japanese had enjoyed at Pearl Harbor a few weeks earlier. For months, the US Navy failed to come up with a plan to end the slaughter. Meanwhile, the American people were not being told how close they were to disaster.

When Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States in December 1941, U-boat skippers were more than ready to take the fight to American shores. In their view, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had already declared war on Germany long before; American warships accompanied convoys bound for Britain, and

tions in American waters and about five battle-ready ones that could set out at once. One of those subs was Hardegen's *U-123*.

Given these paltry resources, Dönitz still expected to make quite an impression on the Americans. He labeled his effort Operation Drumbeat—*Paukenschlag* in German, a word with overtones of thunder and lightning—and assigned to it captains he was sure could stir up American waters.

In U-boat pens all over the coast of western France, German shore personnel and seagoing crews loaded torpedoes and 88mm shells into designated boats. Hardegen's boat was a long-distance Type IX. Type IX boats would do most of the heavy lifting early in the operation; medium-sized Type VII boats would join in later.

Every inch of space on the cramped U-boats was given over to supplies. One toilet on *U-123* was turned into a storage room, leaving only one other for the crew to use. Canned foods were



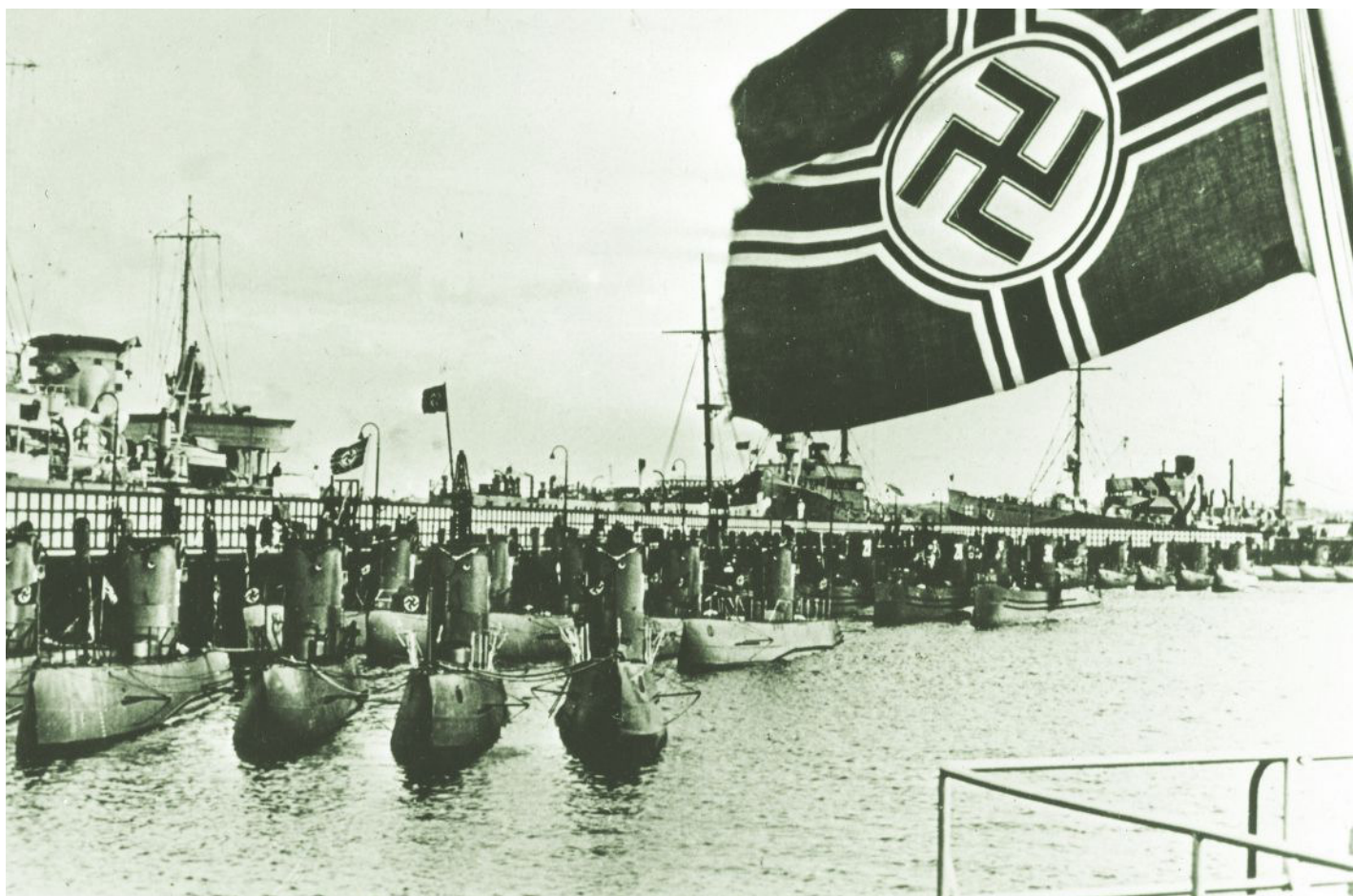
shots had been exchanged between German subs and American ships. The interference of the United States, hiding behind its nominal neutrality, crimped the aggressive style of U-boat skippers and was a thorn in the side of Admiral Karl Dönitz, commander of the U-boat arm of the navy.

Dönitz promptly began planning to take the conflict to the shores of the United States. He worked out a plan that called for scores of submarines to prowl the US coasts and virtually halt shipping there. But Berlin was reluctant to commit so many resources to the effort. Some subs would have to go to Norway to guard against a supposed British invasion. Still others were to be sent to the Mediterranean—which Dönitz regarded as a trap for U-boats—to support Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps. In the end there were only nine subs available for opera-

stowed away deep, followed by fresh foods that would be eaten early in the cruise, much of it bearded with mold by the time it was served. The fuel bunkers were filled with diesel fuel, adding to the stench in the boat. Soon there was a medley of noxious odors and deadly fumes—combustion gasses from the diesel engines, body fluids and waste, rotting food, ripe sweat (bathing and shaving were discouraged), and stale air that had not managed to go through the primitive carbon-dioxide scrubbers.

As the men loaded the boats for what obviously would be a long cruise, excitement grew. In time the men were told that Dönitz had ordered that each boat in the force attack shipping in American waters on the same day—January 13, 1942.

The shocking attacks would target America's Atlantic seaboard, which was under the care of Admiral Adolphus "Dolly"



Andrews, commander of the Eastern Sea Frontier of the United States. Andrews needed destroyers to protect American coastal ship traffic, but they were not forthcoming from Commander in Chief of the US Navy Ernest King, who was sending some to the Pacific and most of the others to convoy duty on transatlantic runs. All Andrews had at his disposal were a few obsolete destroyers, yachts converted to antisubmarine service, and a few coast guard cutters. Neither Andrews nor King were ready to learn the lessons that had been so painfully taught to the Brits in their anti-submarine wars. As *U-123* and her sister ships *U-130*, *U-66*, *U-109*, and *U-125* approached the American coast undetected, King and Andrews were doing almost nothing to protect shipping along the eastern seaboard.

Hardegen started his drumbeat by sinking the large freighter *Cyclops* 300 miles east of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on January 12, a day earlier than Dönitz had prescribed. The United States did not respond. Moving his boat on the surface, Hardegen continued on his way. The next day, he was surprised to find the Montauk Point Lighthouse, at the tip of Long Island, operating and providing him with a clear navigational fix. Hardegen lacked

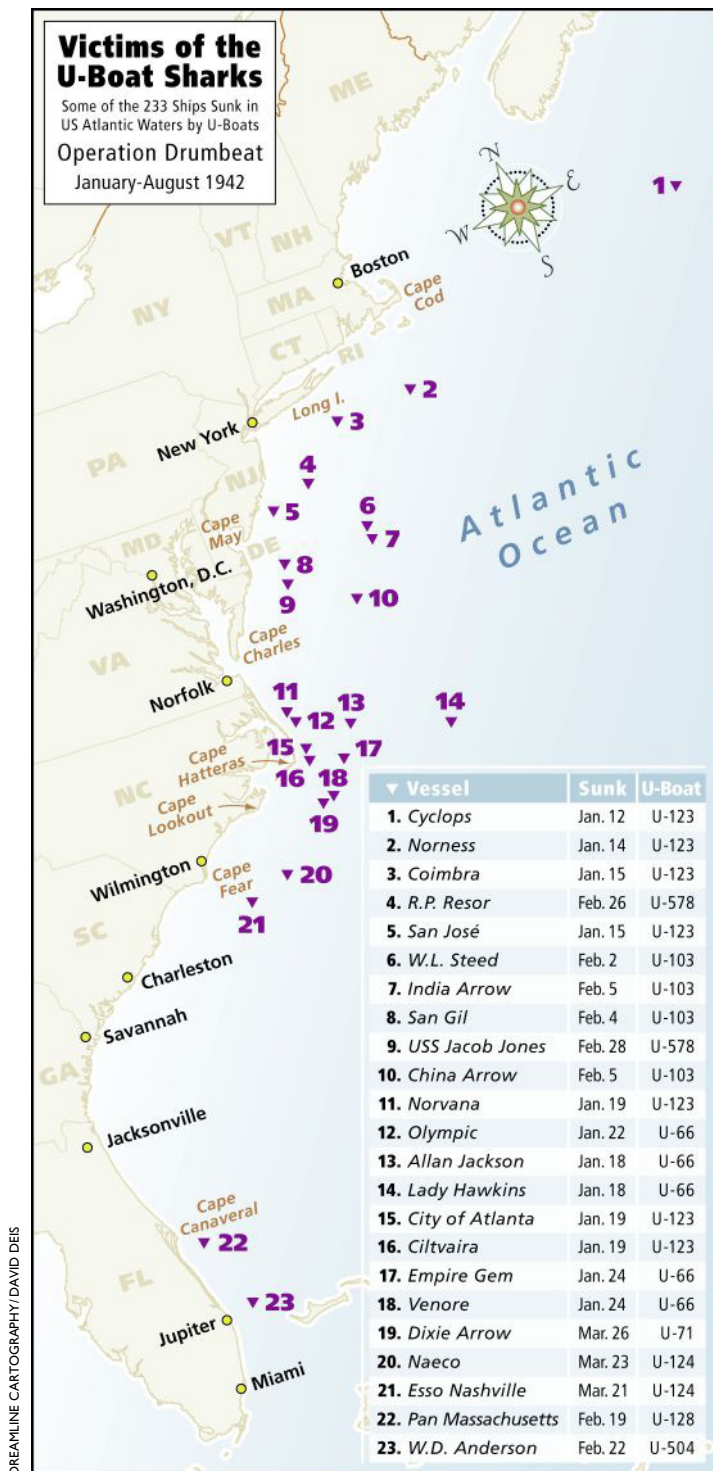
good charts for these waters, but he was agreeably surprised that cars, houses, streetlights, and advertising signs were lit all along the coast, giving him a good idea where he was at all times. He was about 60 miles off Montauk Point when he noticed an object looming ahead. He recalled that it was lit up from stem to stern, as though there were not a war on.

Hardegen maneuvered his sub for a good shot at the vessel, which he correctly made out to be a tanker. He did not bother diving. As soon as he had a firing solution from the ship's calculator, he ordered torpedo tubes one and four flooded. Then he cried, "*Los! Los!*" (Fire! Fire!) Two "eels," or torpedoes, shot into the water. One ran deep; the other ran true. About 50 seconds later, the crew of *U-123* heard a loud explosion. From the conning tower, Hardegen saw a ball of flame rising about 75 feet above the target, followed by a mushroom of black smoke. The U-boat crewmen picked up a distress call on the 40-meter waveband: "Hit by torpedo....40 miles west of Nantucket Lightship.... *Norness*."

Incredibly, the *Norness* remained afloat despite the fires on board. Hardegen maneuvered his boat to give tube five at the stern a shot. "*Los!*" The explosion came right under *Norness's*

Previous spread: A U-boat of Germany's wolf-pack readies for surface combat. U-boats devoured ship after ship along America's East Coast in the first half of 1942. Opposite: It was up to navy chief Admiral Ernest King (left) and Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, Eastern Sea Frontier commander (right, with Navy Secretary Frank Knox), to end the killing spree. While they strategized, Lieutenant Captain Johann Mohr of *U-124* (center, aboard his sub) waxed poetic: "The moon[less] night is as black as ink / Off Hatteras the tankers sink / While sadly Roosevelt counts the score / Some fifty thousand tons." And there were plenty more U-boats in Germany's arsenal (above, at a European base).

SHARKS IN AMERICAN WATERS by Brian John Murphy



bridge, silencing her radio room. Hardegen fired one more shot at the *Norness*, from tube two at the bow. After a 26-second run, the torpedo detonated and the *Norness* began to come apart. It sank straight down, the stern wedging into the sea bottom and leaving about 30 feet of the bow exposed above the waves. The *Norness's* bow stood as a testament to Hardegen's daring, operating in enemy seas so shallow, so close to shore.

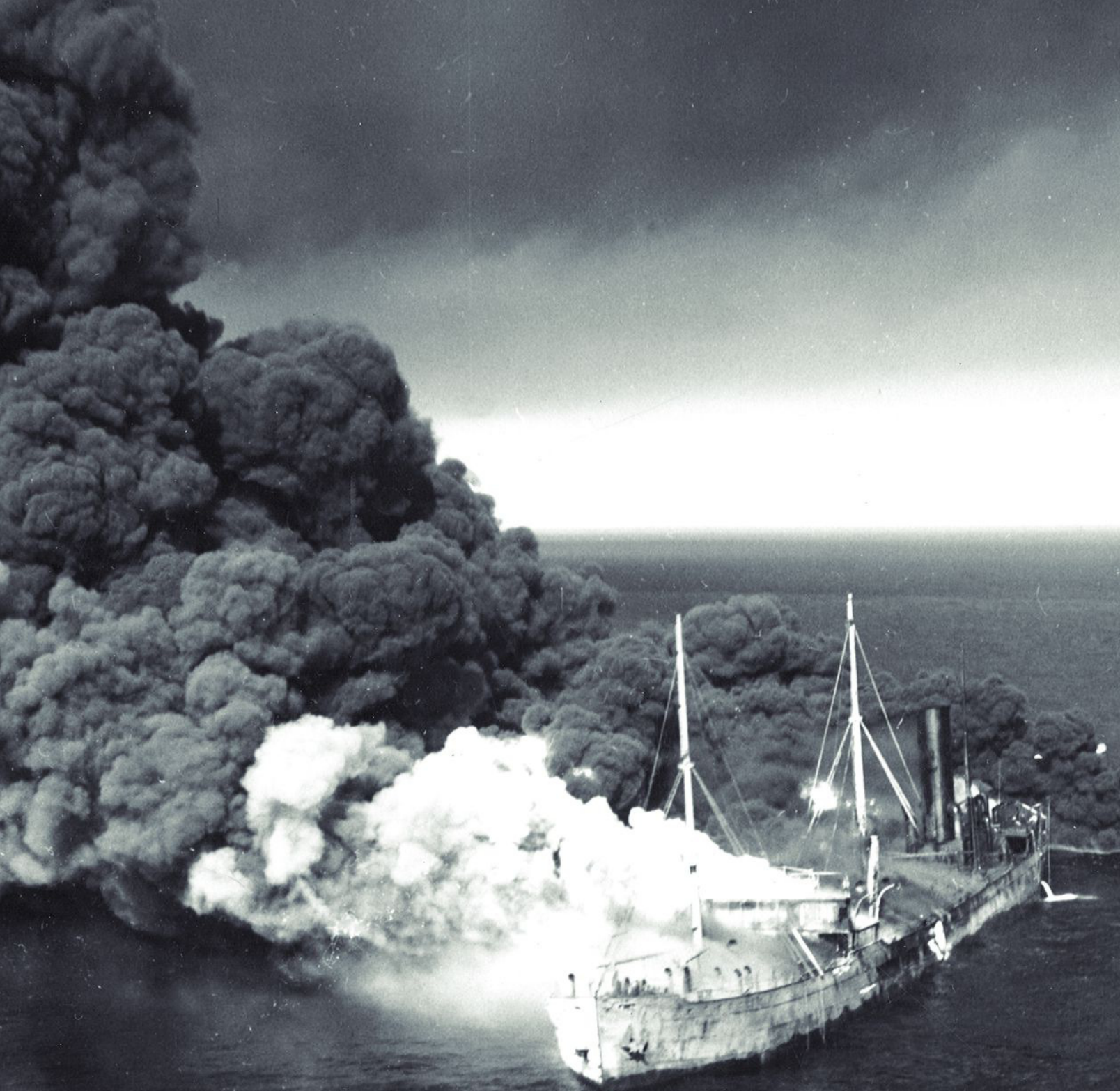
Hardegen would bring the *U-123* into even shallower waters on this cruise. He toyed with the idea of sailing right into New York Harbor, but decided that would be suicidal. His maps were sketchy at best. His position chart for the *Ambrose* lightship that marked the entrance to the harbor channel, for example, was a tourist map of the New York area. Hardegen still wanted to go in close to shore, however, and he headed for a light he took to be a buoy marker. At the last instant, the officers on the conning tower realized the light was on shore. Just before the *123* grounded on the beach of Long Island, the engines were thrown into full reverse and the boat made a getaway.

Hardegen continued to sink Allied shipping on New York's doorstep. On January 15, *U-123* sent two eels into the *Coimbra*, a British tanker that broke and then exploded. "The effect was amazing, strong detonation, fire column reaching 200 meters and the whole sky was illuminated..." Hardegen later wrote. "Quite a bonfire we leave behind for the Yankees as navigational help." He did not bother submerging his boat after the attack, yet no US response came. No planes ventured out after the sub and no destroyers left for sorties. In fact, nothing stopped Hardegen from making another kill: the freighter *San José*. This latest victim was sent to the bottom in shallows 1,000 yards away from the coast guard base at Atlantic City, New Jersey, where an unarmed patrol craft that had been sent out to find the U-boat was having its engines repaired.

ON JANUARY 18, Frigate Captain Richard Zapp and his *U-66* got on the scoreboard off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Zapp positioned his boat in what was probably the busiest sea lane on the eastern seaboard and waited for prey. On his first predawn morning on station, opportunity came Zapp's way in the form of a fully loaded oil tanker, the *Allan Jackson*, bearing more than 72,000 barrels of crude oil. Zapp stalked the tanker for four hours, then put two torpedoes into her. The tanker broke up and burned. *U-66* spent a day submerged and then went hunting that night and found a Canadian passenger liner, the *Lady Hawkins*. Two torpedoes were enough to send her to the bottom. Of 300 passengers and crew, only 96 survived.

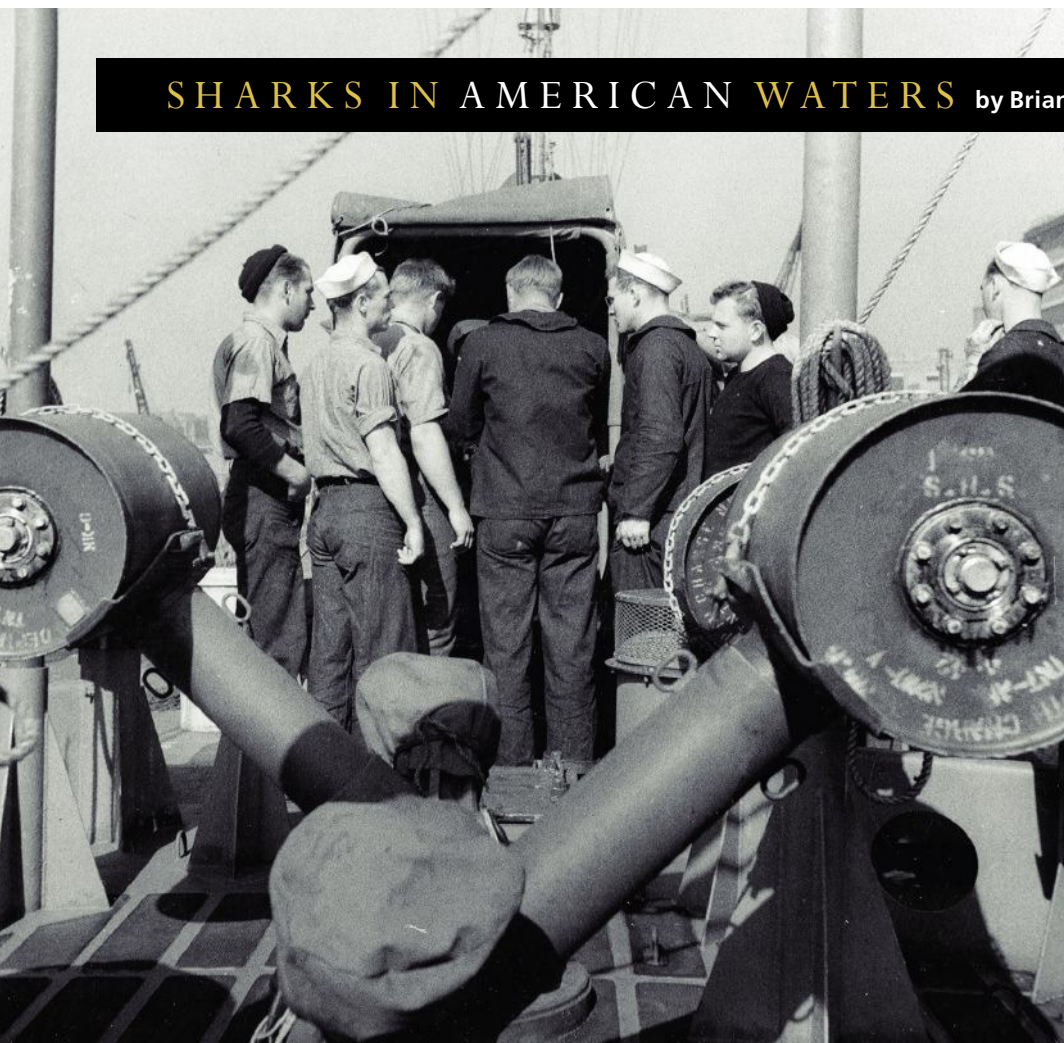
Hardegen and the *U-123* were still busy. They were operating off Hatteras on the night of January 19, when they found a target—the *City of Atlanta*. Two eels sank the freighter, taking more than 40 men down with her. That same predawn morning, Hardegen's boat spotted three more targets coming up over the northern horizon and sank one of them, the brightly lit freighter *Ciltvaira*. Against the advice of his officers, Hardegen sped after a second target and began firing on it with his 88mm deck gun. There was an eruption of fire when the gun found its target, the *Malay*, which ran for Norfolk, Virginia, and made it the next day, though hardly in one piece.

Hardegen and the crew of *U-123* had given a virtuosic performance since their arrival in American waters. They had attacked eight ships and had sunk six of them without the Americans firing a single shot in response. On the way home, *U-123* sank two more ships using only her deck gun. Hardegen would receive the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for his feats.



Amid the terror and tragedy of the U-boat attacks, there were heartrending displays of heroism. A standout case occurred aboard the tanker *Dixie Arrow* when it was torpedoed off North Carolina's Outer Banks on March 26, 1942 (above). Clouds of flame billowed skyward, blowing toward the bow where the crew had crammed together on deck. On the bridge, Able Seaman Oscar Chappel saw what was happening and turned the ship into the wind. As the flames blew away from his shipmates, they engulfed the bridge. Chappel locked the wheel in place before he was incinerated.

SHARKS IN AMERICAN WATERS by Brian John Murphy



Meanwhile, Zapp was not idle. Still off North Carolina's Outer Banks, *U-66* sank the freighter *Olympic* with two shots. In a double score on January 23, Zapp torpedoed the tanker *Empire Gem*, and three minutes later, the freighter *Venore*, which was laden with iron ore from Chile. Zapp sailed for home, having used up all his torpedoes.

By this time, other U-boats were also causing havoc along Admiral Andrews's Eastern Sea Frontier. From January 11 to January 31, 1942, the boats of Dönitz's operation attacked 40 ships and sent almost all of them to the bottom. These were the easiest pickings the U-boats had enjoyed since their first months against the British in 1939, which U-boat men had dubbed the "Happy Time." Soon, the days of Operation Drumbeat were known as the "Second Happy Time." Flush with success, Dönitz sent more and more U-boats into the battle.

Andrews appealed in vain to King for the firepower to fight back: destroyers, planes, whatever it took to track down and kill the seeming horde of U-boats that were having their way in American waters. At this point in the battle, however, neither King nor Andrews was ready to accept the conclusion the British had

reached early on: the only way to get merchant vessels safely through U-boat-infested waters was by guarded convoy. Instead, scarce assets like destroyers and coast guard cutters were sent out on hunting expeditions in the heavily traveled sea lanes. They weren't escorting merchantmen, which would attract U-boats, but instead were hunting subs much in the random way a novice sport fisherman hunts fish in the open sea. The results of those first weeks of hunting were hundreds of depth charges expended (including some dropped on the wreck of the Civil War ironclad gunboat *USS Monitor*), but no Nazi subs sunk. The U-boats held complete sway over the Eastern Sea Frontier.

THE GERMANS KEPT UP THE TEMPO of the attack, sinking another 32 ships in February. By now the U-boats were not strictly adhering to the doctrine of attacking only at night and lying on the bottom during the day. On February 2, Lieutenant Captain Werner Winter made a daylight attack with his *U-103* on the tanker *W.L. Steed*, 100 miles off Ocean City, Maryland. After hitting and stopping the tanker with a single torpedo, Winter shelled the hapless tanker for 40 minutes with his 88mm deck

America had the tools to fight the U-boats, but King was slow to give them to Andrews. The tools included destroyers toting "ash cans," or depth charges. TNT accounted for 300 of the cans' 465 pounds. Sub-hunters lobbed them into the sea with catapults—either a Y-gun (above, left, aboard *Patrol Craft 556*) or K-gun—to sink and strike subs (above, center, explosion seen from coast guard cutter *Spencer*).

Planes were effective, too; here (above, right), bombs from a US Navy plane explode over two U-boats.



gun. The U-boat was close to the tanker when it exploded, causing a pulse of heat that made the men on *103* shield their faces from the blast.

Two days later, Winter sank the 3,000-ton banana boat *San Gil* off Virginia and then doubled back north. His hunting instinct proved sound when he found the tanker *India Arrow*, loaded with diesel fuel, about 20 miles southeast of Cape May, New Jersey. He stalked the ship until it was perfectly silhouetted by the lights of Atlantic City. Then he put a single eel into her, and she went up in flames. When Winter and his crew turned away, she was sinking as men burned alive on her decks. On the night of February 5, Winter continued his war on the American tanker fleet, attacking *China Arrow* off Cape Hatteras. Two torpedoes failed to sink the tanker, which was equipped with a state-of-the-art fire suppression system. So, Winter finished off *China Arrow* with shells from the 88mm deck gun.

The Germans used the month of February to expand their hunting area south of the Carolinas to Georgia and Florida. On February 19, Corvette Captain Ulrich Heyse in *U-128* made an attack in broad daylight off Jacksonville, Florida, against the 8,201-ton tanker *Pan Massachusetts*. Carrying gasoline and fuel oil, the ship burned fiercely after being hit by two torpedoes. For a change, there was a response from shore. A coast guard cutter and two navy planes went out to investigate and assist with rescue, though *U-128* escaped without being attacked. On February

22, *U-501* attacked the tanker *W.D. Anderson* just 12 miles from the lighthouse at Jupiter, Florida. Torpedoes detonated an explosion on the ship that was heard all the way down in Miami.

Old hunting grounds continued to yield rich results for the Germans. On February 26, *U-578* attacked the tanker *R.P. Resor*, carrying 78,729 barrels of oil. The ship burned for two days, shedding smoke that was visible to crowds for miles along the New Jersey coast. Only two of the 50 men aboard survived the blazes.

Great Britain was beginning to worry deeply about the United States' lack of response to the German offensive in its waters. When the British admiralty suggested that the United States adopt a coastal convoy system, King, who detested the British, replied coldly. Nonetheless, he did accept the Brits' offer of 24 antisubmarine trawlers to operate in US waters.

King also gave Andrews the US destroyers *Jacob Jones* (DD-130) and *Dickerson* (DD-157) for hunting subs. The two ships steamed out of New York and past the pyre of the *R.P. Resor*. The *Resor's* tormentor, *U-578*, commanded by Corvette Captain Ernst-August Rehwinkel, was still in the area and watched the progress of the *Jacob Jones* with a hunter's interest. At 5 A.M. on February 28, Rehwinkel put two eels into her. One of them exploded the magazine. As the shattered ship went down, her depth charges detonated, killing crewmen who were struggling in the water. Of 200 men, only 11 survived. *U-578* escaped without being attacked.



February ended in flames and catastrophe. March was just as bad, with 48 attacks, almost all of which ended in sinkings. Tankers continued to be the number one target of the U-boats, and shortfalls in oil and oil product deliveries were beginning to seriously worry the oil industry. Oil companies were afraid they would be unable to deliver enough heating and fuel oil for the northeastern states. Complaints were beginning to reach President Franklin Roosevelt, who was perhaps the only man King listened to.

Meanwhile, the lights of the American shore still blazed, silhouetting tankers and freighters for eager U-boat captains. The targets themselves continued to steam with their navigational lights lit. Sometimes entire ships were lit brightly from stem to stern. Small wonder then that the month ended with nasty tanker sinkings courtesy of *U-124* and Lieutenant Captain Johann Mohr. Mohr believed all he needed to do was post himself near a navigational buoy and wait for the targets to come to him. He wasn't far wrong. On March 21, while patrolling near Frying Pan Buoy off North Carolina, *U-124* spotted the *Esso Nashville*. German

torpedoes met the tanker. A massive explosion lifted the 13,000-ton ship and its 78,000 barrels of fuel oil off the surface of the ocean and slammed it onto its side. Another tanker, the *Atlantic Sun*, hove into view, and Mohr tried a long distance torpedo shot that hit but did not sink her; she escaped to Beaufort, North Carolina. On March 23, off Point Lookout, North Carolina, Mohr hit the tanker *Naeco* and set it ablaze with his last torpedo. A fire broke out that incinerated the tanker's captain, Emil Englebrecht, and his entire watch. Another explosion turned the *Naeco* into an inferno. When rescuers arrived the next day, the site of the sinking was a vista of burned, floating corpses.

In the early morning hours of March 26, the slaughter of tankers off the Outer Banks continued when the *Dixie Arrow* hove into view of Lieutenant Captain Walter Flaschenberg's *U-71*, which had stationed itself off the Diamond Shoals Lighted Buoy. It was 9 A.M. when the *U-71* attacked. Able Seaman Oscar Chappel was at the *Dixie Arrow*'s helm. After the torpedo attack ignited a raging fire, most of the crew assembled at the bow of the

There was more tedium than glory in sub-hunting—recruiting aside (opposite). But when Andrews created ship convoys protected by destroyers and planes, the sub-hunters gained the edge over U-boats. In an offshore example, a U-boat man slogs aboard the coast guard cutter *Spencer*, which sank his *U-175* off Ireland (above).

SHARKS IN AMERICAN WATERS by Brian John Murphy

burning ship. Chappel turned the ship into the wind to blow the flames away from his shipmates—and back toward himself—and locked the wheel in place. He was overtaken by the flames and incinerated. The *U-71* hung around to watch the spectacle when the unexpected happened: a destroyer attacked! USS *Tarbell* (DD-142) pinged the *U-71* with its sonar and made a depth-charge run at her. The charges missed, however, and *U-71* zigzagged away to the east as fast as her electric motors could drive her.

The intervention of USS *Tarbell* was an exception to the general poor luck antisubmarine forces had in finding U-boats. Although few of the ships hunting the subs were aggressive, it was really the doctrine that guided their hunting—that individual ships should hunt on their own—that was to blame. The doctrine was firmly embedded, though, and it manifested itself afresh in Andrews's desperate decision to resurrect a trick from World War I. Three Q ships—merchantmen fitted with concealed armament and used as bait to snare attacking U-boats—were sent out. Only one, the *Atik*, made contact with the enemy. Unfortunately, that enemy was the returning Hardegen and his *U-123*, which promptly sank the *Atik*. The other Q ships never sighted any enemy vessels.

By mid-April there were slight indications that the U-boat battle might yet turn in favor of the Americans. USS *Roper* (DD-147), a destroyer fitted with radar, was out hunting off North Carolina just after midnight on April 14, when her radar found a solid target at a range of 2,700 yards. The skipper, Lieutenant Commander Hamilton Howe, wasn't sure the target was a sub until it started zigzagging. All doubt was erased when a torpedo just missed the *Roper's* bow. Her powerful searchlight found the sub's conning tower about 300 yards away, as the U-boat was turning hard to starboard. One of the *Roper's* .50-caliber machine guns opened up, cutting down the crew of the enemy's 88mm deck gun. Machine gun rounds continued to sweep the enemy decks as the *Roper* opened fire with a three-inch gun. The first round hit the conning tower; other three-inch rounds also found the sub, which sank into the water stern first. *Roper* then depth-charged the wreck for good measure. With the sinking of the *U-85*, the United States was at last on the scoreboard.

Tactical changes were in the works for Andrews's fleet, which by April was made up of 23 large and 42 small antisubmarine vessels, including the British trawlers. The new system grouped merchant ships into mini-convoys dubbed "bucket brigades." During the day, the convoys would be escorted on their way, and at night, they would put in at sheltered harbors. Planes, including Civil Air Patrol craft, would fly overhead. The mere sight of an airplane was known to send U-boats diving, so even an air patrol Piper Cub might disrupt an enemy attack.

These measures slowed but did not stop the loss of merchant

ships. One tactic merchants had used to avoid attack was to sail 300 miles east of the Outer Banks, but the U-boats found them and continued the slaughter.

At the end of April, King and Andrews agreed that Andrews would take direct control over tanker sailings. All tanker traffic on the coast was ordered into port to await further orders. While Andrews worked on what to do next, the seaborne hauling of oil was halted, which hampered the Allied war effort from the oil-hungry factories of New England all the way to the empty petrol tanks of old England. A solution was needed fast.

Meanwhile, the range of the submarine war was increasing. In May and June, Dönitz expanded operations into the Florida Keys and the Gulf of Mexico. The mouth of the Mississippi turned out to be a particularly lucrative killing ground for the U-boats.

BY MID-MAY planning was coming together for a true convoy system for the Eastern Sea Frontier. As convoys were implemented, U-boat skippers began to notice that sightings of individual ships occurred much less frequently. When ships were sighted, they were found in clusters with trawlers, cutters, and destroyers scurrying about in escort. Overhead, army and navy patrol planes kept an eye out for subs. The risks of attacking grew as the waters and skies filled with sub-hunters. The rejuvenated American effort began to take a toll on the Germans. The coast guard's *Icarus* sank *U-352*, and army pilot Lieutenant Harry Kane dropped two depth-bombs on the *U-701* in a perfect attack that put the sub on the bottom for good.

In May and June 1942, as the convoy system was still being phased in (with increasing enthusiasm from King, a former foe of convoys), there were 87 attacks on Allied shipping. In July and August, with well-escorted convoys moving under air cover and with the coast finally blacked out at nighttime, there were only 26. In June one U-boat was sunk, in July three, and in August one. The battle for the Eastern Sea Frontier was ending. Dönitz brought his remaining forces home in August.

The U-boats had scored the most one-sided and damaging victory against the United States of any foreign naval power. Germany had sunk 233 ships off the East Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico and killed no fewer than 5,000 seamen and passengers. Every month of Operation Drumbeat, German subs destroyed 3.5 percent of the tanker fleet for a total of 22 percent. The operation caused major disruptions in war-material production and in the shipping of supplies to the war fronts. This was Germany's first strategic victory of the war that directly impacted on the American homeland. Fortunately, it was also its last. ★

The late BRIAN JOHN MURPHY of Fairfield, Connecticut, wrote extensively for America in WWII, mostly on military topics.





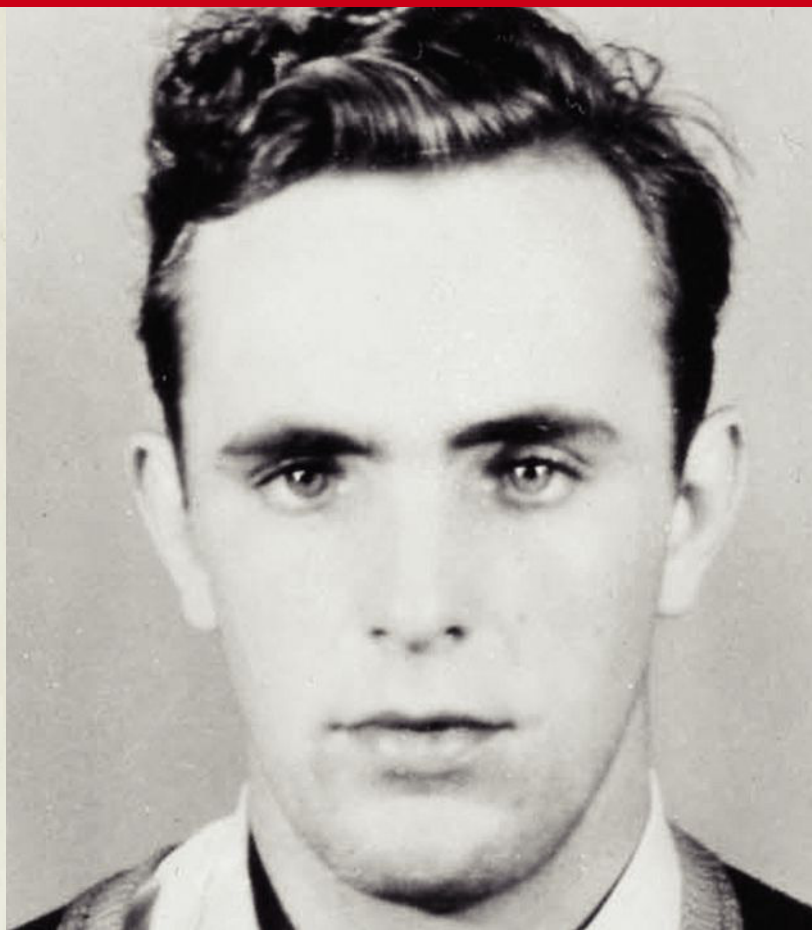
WWII MYSTERIES AND MAYHEM • Part 7



MAYHEM

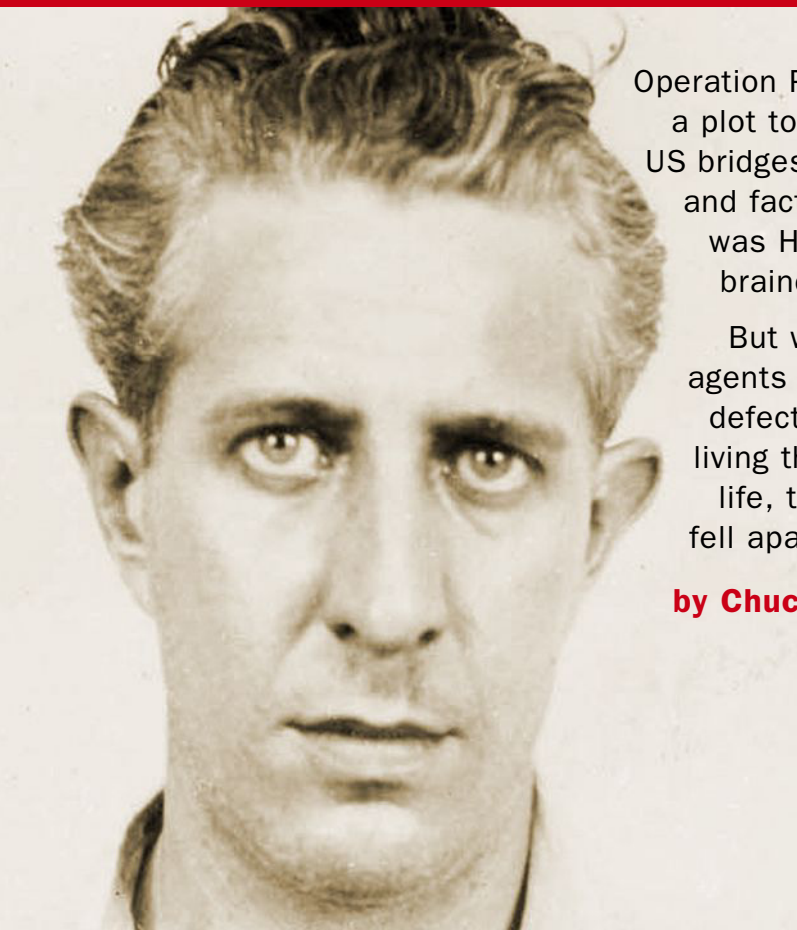


Nazi





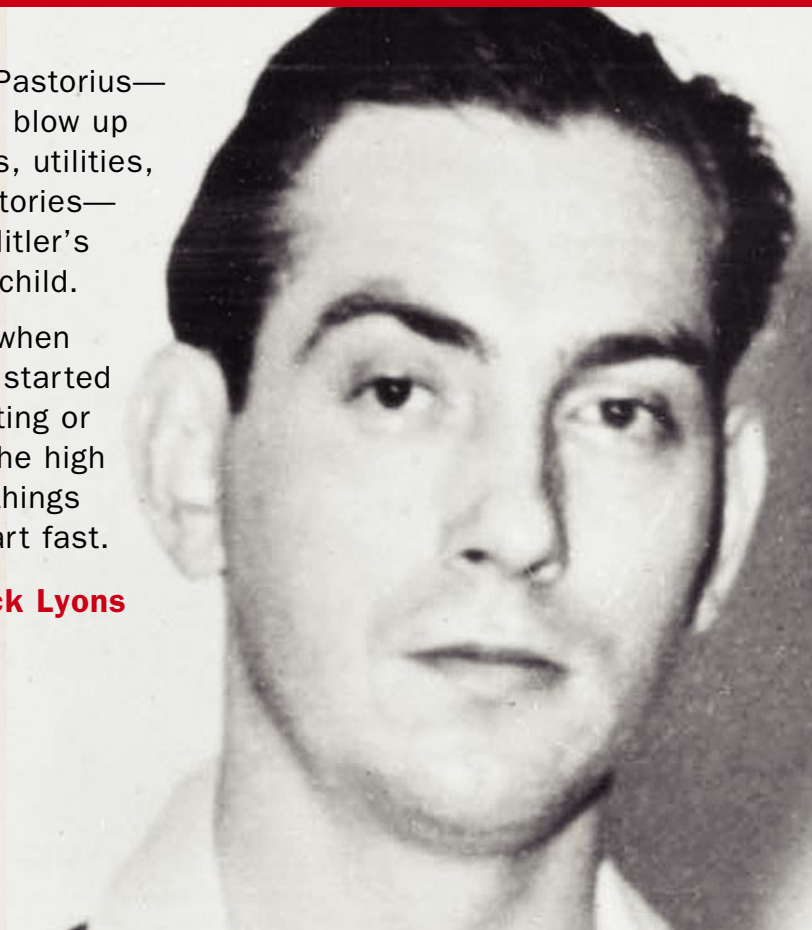
Agents Come Ashore



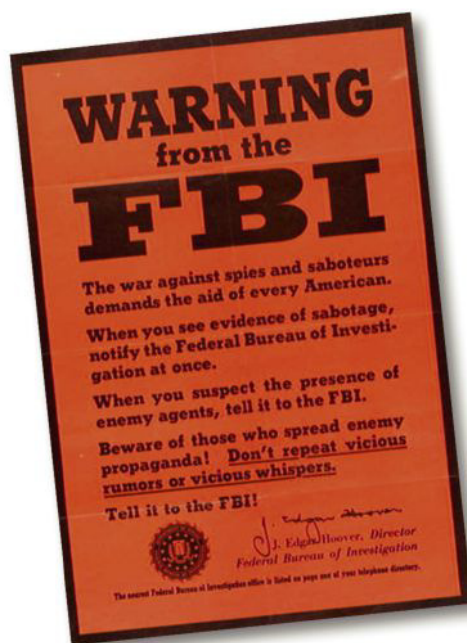
Operation Pastorius—
a plot to blow up
US bridges, utilities,
and factories—
was Hitler's
brainchild.

But when
agents started
defecting or
living the high
life, things
fell apart fast.

by Chuck Lyons



Nazi Agents Come Ashore by Chuck Lyons

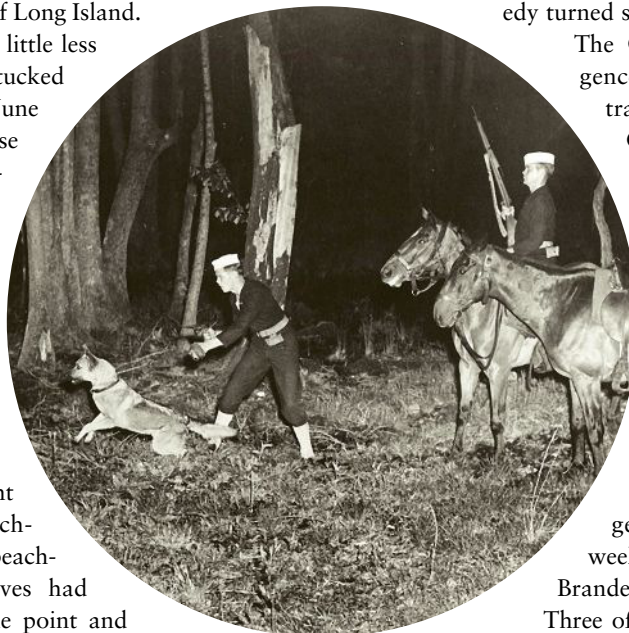


IF SOMEONE HAD BEEN PAYING ATTENTION, it would have been hard to miss the four men dressed in Nazi navy uniforms wading through the breaking waves along the shore of Long Island.

Their intentions were a little less obvious, hidden like the explosives tucked into their clothing. Here it was June 1942, six months after the Japanese had attacked America, and now U-boats had quietly put Nazi boots on American ground a hundred miles from New York City.

The German spies had come to carry out a plot that had originated with Adolf Hitler himself, a plot that some considered one of the most daring sabotage schemes in history. German U-boats, quietly and under cover of darkness, landed eight men, well-trained in sabotage techniques, on Long Island and Florida beaches. All eight of the Nazi operatives had resided in the United States at some point and were comfortable with the language and culture. Two of them were even American citizens. The men carried ample US money as well as explosives, detonators, and other equipment to be used to destroy hydroelectric facilities, aluminum plants, river

locks, bridges, and railroad lines and equipment. But what happened after the landings was more Pink Panther than James Bond—until the end of the story, when the screwball comedy turned straight-face serious.



The German Abwehr, the military intelligence organization that recruited and trained the men, named the mission Operation Pastorius after Francis Pastorius, 17th-century founder of the first permanent German settlement in the United States (Germantown, now part of Philadelphia). The Abwehr had scoured German military records to find and recruit 12 men who had lived in the United States. Then it trained them in physical fitness, explosives, and secret writing; furnished them cover stories; brushed up their English; and generally prepped them during five weeks at a camp on Quenz Lake near Brandenburg, Prussia.

Three of the men dropped out of the program early. The remaining nine were divided into two teams led by recruits George Dasch and Edward Kerling. Dasch had lived in the United States for 20 years before returning to his native Germany and had even served briefly in the US Army Air Corps.

Previous spread: Nazi intelligence chose eight men to cross the Atlantic by submarine and turn Adolf Hitler's idea for terrorizing America into reality—(clockwise from top left) George Dasch, Ernst Burger, Richard Quirin, Heinrich Heinck, Hermann Neubauer, Werner Thiel, Herbert Haupt, and Edward Kerling. Above, top: Concerned about the potential for infiltrators like these to wreak havoc, the FBI urged citizens to report suspicious sightings. Above, bottom: Coastguardsmen like these (location and date unspecified) hunted for the Nazi operatives sighted on the Long Island shore in June 1942. Opposite: Called in by the coast guard, FBI agents remove boxes of explosives the Germans had buried in the sand.

ALL PHOTOS THIS STORY: NATIONAL ARCHIVES; POSTERS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS





Kerling, the most ardent Nazi of the group, had lived and worked in the States for 11 years before returning to the Fatherland.

After training, the operatives traveled to Berlin to receive final instructions. But they spent most of their time visiting nightclubs and spending Abwehr cash. Several got into trouble with local authorities, and one, former German seaman Heinrich Heinck, announced loudly in a bar that he was a secret agent. Another got into a boisterous argument with a prostitute at his hotel. Apparently, and fortunately for German undercover operations, no one seemed to take any of this seriously.

Next, the men traveled by train to Paris, squabbling on the way about the selection of their leaders. From there they proceeded to Lorient, France, where they were to board U-boats that would ferry them across the Atlantic. Before leaving, they would be given money to finance their operation: \$50,000 to each of the two leaders and \$4,400 to each of the other seven men.

DASCH WAS STASHING HIS CASH in a suitcase with a false bottom when he realized much of it was in gold notes, so-called yellowbacks that had been taken out of circulation when the United States went off the gold standard in 1934. The men were angry about the mistake, imagining themselves trying to spend the notes and immediately being tagged as spies. When they confronted Abwehr Lieutenant Walter Kappe, commander of the operation, he seemed unimpressed. "Just throw those bills out," he said.

The faith of his men in their handlers and in the operation itself had been undermined. "I kept thinking about that money," Dasch said later. "If they could be that stupid, how much did they really care about any of us? What chance did we have?"

Further confusing matters, Dasch suddenly remembered that he had left his papers—including an American Social Security card and notes he had taken during his training—on the train. He rushed back to the station and explained to a worker that the documents he left behind must not fall into enemy hands. Suspicious railroad officials turned him over to the Gestapo, and he had to call Kappe to rescue him. The papers were never retrieved.

In late May 1942, the operatives were finally about to board the two U-boats and set out for the United States. Before they did, however, one of Dasch's five-man team was discovered to have contracted a sexually transmitted disease. He was dropped from the mission. That left eight agents total, four on each sub.

The first of the two subs was the one that landed Dasch and his men on the beach at Amagansett, Long Island. They came ashore in the predawn hours of June 12 wearing military uniforms so if caught they would be classified and treated as prisoners of war rather than as spies.

Dasch's team included Ernst Burger, a Nazi party member who had lived in the United States and had served in the National Guard. He was an American citizen. There was also Richard Quirin, who had resided and worked in Schenectady, New York,

Left: George Dasch, five foot, nine inches of trouble. So it seemed. Dasch claimed he had no intention of doing Hitler's dirty work in America. He had signed up for the sabotage operation just to get out of Nazi Germany.

Nazi Agents Come Ashore by Chuck Lyons

from 1927 to 1939. And then Heinck, the former German seaman who had jumped ship and lived in the States for 13 years.

While the four men were changing into civilian clothes, US Coast Guardsman John C. Cullen was patrolling the beach. He discovered Dasch and the others hiding amidst the dunes. Dasch told him they were fishermen who had got lost in the fog. Cullen invited them to spend the rest of the night at the nearby coast guard station. When his offer was refused, he became suspicious—moreso when he heard a member of Dasch's team shout something in German.

Dasch realized his story was falling apart and pulled out a pistol. He threatened to kill Cullen and his family. Cullen, it turned out, was unarmed, carrying only a flashlight. But Dasch backed off and shoved a handful of cash, about \$260, into Cullen's pocket. He told Cullen to forget what he had seen. Realizing it might be his only chance to escape, Cullen agreed, kept the money, and ran back to the coast guard station to report the incident.

Soon Cullen returned leading a coast guard patrol. The German agents were gone, but in the predawn light, he could see offshore the outline of a grounded German submarine that was trying to dislodge itself. The patrol searched the beach and



turned up buried German supplies. It reported everything to the FBI.

Four days later, on June 16, the other four-member team of German operatives went ashore at Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, south of Jacksonville. Their landing proceeded without incident. After burying their supply of explosives and equipment for later use, they boarded trains for Chicago and Cincinnati.

Herbert Haupt was one of the men under Edward Kerling's command. He was the youngest of the group at age 22. He had moved to Chicago in 1923 and become a United States citizen in 1930. Then there was Edward Neubauer, a cook who had worked at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. Werner Thiel had lived in America for 14 years and had filed citizenship papers before returning to Germany.

Back in New York State, Burger, who had earlier gotten into trouble with the Gestapo and spent 17 months in a concentration camp, registered with Dasch at the Governor Clinton Hotel in Kingston, a hundred miles north of New York City, while Heinck and Quirin registered at the Martinique on Broadway. Shortly after settling in, Burger and Dasch agreed between themselves that they would defect. Each admitted to the other that had been his plan from the beginning.

Above: The evidence was in—a spade found on the beach along with a box full of explosives supplies, including 10 TNT blocks and 4 bombs resembling coal. Right: The heightened concern over spies might seem to have been exaggerated, but it was reasonable in the highly uncertain early months of war.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

From before Pearl Harbor until the end of the war, Germany made many efforts to obtain military, economic, and political information by placing spies in North and Latin America. To name a few:

- The largest operation, the Duquesne Spy Ring, was headed by naturalized US citizen Fritz Duquesne and involved 31 agents, many of whom had jobs that allowed them to gather information on the United States' readiness for war. An FBI double agent broke the ring in 1940 and 1941, and the operatives were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 1 to 18 years.
- In November 1942 a German agent landed in Canada, but was caught hours later after he left a box of Belgian matches behind in a hotel room.
- Four groups of Nazi agents who operated in the United States for some time, reporting on shipping and war production, were discovered in late 1943 and early 1944.
- Two Nazi agents landed by U-boat in Maine in 1944 and were later captured in New York City. (Read the full article on this operation from our October 2005 issue at www.americanwwii.com/articles/nazi-spies-come-ashore.)

CHUCK LYONS



Nazi Agents Come Ashore by Chuck Lyons

Dasch called the New York office of the FBI, said he had just landed from a German submarine, and would soon travel to Washington, DC, with important information. The FBI initially considered the report a crackpot call, but as word of the coast guard encounter on the Amagansett beach and the discovery of the hidden explosives arrived, the reaction turned serious.

Dasch remained in New York briefly and then took a train to Washington to turn himself in. It was now June 19, only a week after the landing on Long Island. When reports on the German spies reached FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, his “imaginative and restless energy was stirred into... action,” recalled US Attorney General Francis Biddle. “He was determined to catch them all before any sabotage took place.”

HOOVER CLAMPED DOWN with a media blackout, while his agents interrogated Dasch in Washington for two days. The transcript of the questioning ran to 254 single-spaced pages. Dasch revealed that his operation was just the first of a series of such sabotage missions the Germans had planned. He listed the targets he had instructions to hit and described methods of attack. He revealed U-boat tactics and information about German war production. He also turned over a handkerchief on which the names of American contacts had been written in invisible ink, though he couldn't remember how to make the ink appear. He also gave names and locations for the operatives who had landed with him.

The other German saboteurs were unaware that Dasch had turned himself in and that they were being hunted by the FBI as they settled into nice hotels in New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati. They lived comfortably on Abwehr money, visiting gambling establishments, hiring prostitutes, reuniting with family and friends they had left behind years earlier, and meeting up with old girlfriends. One agent even made marriage plans. None had yet gotten around to sabotaging any of the targets.

Using the information Dasch supplied—along with the secret writing on the handkerchief, which the FBI lab was able to reveal with ammonia fumes—agents arrested Burger in his hotel room. Shortly after that, Heinck and Quirin were arrested when they returned to the Martinique after an afternoon at the movies. Kerling and Thiel had stopped in Cincinnati and then taken a train to New York to visit Kerling's brand new wife, whom he had just married there. FBI agents picked up both men quickly. At the same time, Haupt had moved back in with his parents in Chicago and was put under surveillance until he led the FBI to Neubauer. Both of them were then arrested.

On June 23, Hoover went public with news of the German sabotage plot and the FBI's role in uncovering and stopping it, praising the effort as “the detective work of the century.” He did not mention Dasch's defection. Suddenly things got very serious. Hoover pressed for a death sentence for all eight Germans and urged Biddle to try them not in a civilian court but by a military



Hermann Neubauer is escorted from court on July 9, 1942. The trial for the accused spies had begun the previous day and continued until August 1, with the verdict coming two days later.

TARGETS FOR TROUBLEMAKERS

Had the eight operatives of Operation Pastorius taken their destructive mission seriously, they might have done some real, if temporary, damage to America's war productivity. Here are the missions the Abwehr assigned to them:

Niagara Falls: destroy hydroelectric plants

Aluminum Company of America: destroy factories in Illinois, New York, and Tennessee

Louisville, Kentucky: ruin locks for ship navigation on the Ohio River

Altoona, Pennsylvania: destroy the sharply bending Horseshoe Curve railroad pass and the Pennsylvania Railroad's Altoona maintenance shops

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: destroy a plant that produced cryolite, a mineral used in the extraction and processing of aluminum

New York City: blow up the Hell Gate Bridge, on the East River



Newark's Pennsylvania Station made for an attractive postcard—and potential terrorist target, with its high volume of daily commuters.

between Queens, Randall's and Wards islands, and the Bronx

Newark, New Jersey: disable Pennsylvania Station, a rail terminal

The agents were also to wreak havoc by setting off damaging explosives at water treatment plants, rail stations, on bridges, and at Jewish businesses.

Had the eight would-be saboteurs carried out their ambitious list of missions, the effect would have been devastating. But damaging even one of the larger tar-

gets could have hurt the US war effort, at least temporarily. The Horseshoe Curve, for instance, was a key component in getting troops, steel, and war materiel over the Allegheny Mountains. Created in the mid-1800s, this engineering landmark featured a massive hairpin loop of railroad track that spread out the climb over the steep 60-foot incline, making it more gradual and manageable for trains.



No story of wartime spies caught red-handed on enemy ground ever comes to a happy ending. Here, armed guards line the road as ambulances leave the District of Columbia jail with the bodies of the six Nazi agents who were executed in the electric chair there on August 11, 1942.

tribunal, which was generally considered stricter. “Surely they are as guilty as it is possible to be,” Hoover wrote, “and it seems to me that the death penalty is almost obligatory.”

Biddle agreed with Hoover. Within a month of the landing on Long Island, the eight men were put on trial before a tribunal of seven generals in the Department of Justice building in Washington. Under specific instructions from President Franklin Roosevelt, they were charged with corresponding with or giving intelligence to the enemy, spying, and conspiracy. Hoover had not told Roosevelt about Dasch’s whistleblower roll in uncovering the plot.

At the trial, the prosecution stressed that only the work of the FBI had kept the saboteurs from carrying out their mission and the fact that no sabotage had actually been done was irrelevant. The defense, on the other hand, argued that none of the men had actually sabotaged anything and suggested that they never intended to. The men had only involved themselves in the operation, defense lawyers said, to get back to the United States and to reestablish the ties they had left behind here.

DASCH’S DEFENSE WAS SEPARATE from the others. His counsel argued that the case would never have been broken without him and that the FBI had promised him his freedom in return for the information he had supplied. His lawyer said that he was clearly planning to defect since the beginning of the mission and that he had disobeyed orders by not killing coast guardsman Cullen, to whom he had deliberately revealed his face and name.

The judge advocate summed up Dasch’s argument with this: “To accept the version of the defense is to concede that the defendants came here not as invaders but as refugees.” The panel did not concede that, and instead found all eight defendants guilty. It recommended that all of them be executed, but that the final decision on their fate be left to Roosevelt.

By now aware of Dasch’s and Burger’s roles in revealing the plot, Roosevelt commuted Burger’s sentence to life in prison and Dasch’s to 30 years. Five days after the trial’s end, the remaining six men were executed in alphabetical order in the electric chair on the third floor of the District of Columbia jail and buried in unmarked graves in a potter’s field.

Within two months of landing on American soil, six of the eight men were dead and the other two had begun long prison sentences. The failure of the plot had all but ended German plans for sabotage on US soil. Hitler was reported to be furious over the failure.

Six years later, in 1948, after the war was over and the documents concerning Dasch, the plot, and the trial had been made public, President Harry S. Truman granted clemency to Dasch and Burger on the condition that they be deported to the American zone of occupied Germany. Burger disappeared a few years later, and Dasch died in Germany in 1992, still awaiting the pardon he said J. Edgar Hoover had promised him half a century earlier. ★

CHUCK LYONS, a former newspaper editor, writes from Rochester, New York, on home-front topics for America in WWII.

WWII America's Dark Side

by Carl Zebrowski

THE GIs STRUTTING DOWN East 1st Street on June 7, 1943, obviously meant business. “They had just come out of a cocktail bar where four men were nursing bruises...,” wrote Al Waxman, editor of the small Los Angeles newspaper the *Eastside Journal*. “Farther down the street the [GIs] stopped a streetcar, forcing the motorman to open the door, and proceeded to inspect the clothing of the male passengers. ‘We’re looking for zoot-suits to burn,’ they shouted.”

Servicemen had been hearing rumors that Mexican American boys wearing the oversized zoot suits that were trendy in their neighborhoods were beating up GIs. The zoot-suiters, meanwhile, had been hearing that GIs were accosting and molesting Mexican American girls. Both claims were dubious, but with tensions already smoldering over various wartime race issues, all-out riots exploded in the city. Soon afterward, similar smoldering tensions blew up in Detroit. By the end of what became known as “bloody week” in Motor City, 25 blacks and 8 whites lay dead.

Americans were flush with patriotism as their boys fought Axis forces in Europe, the Pacific, and Africa. They were feeling good about their fellow countrymen, their mutual sacrifice for a just cause, and about simply being dutiful world citizens. But some things never change, and crime is one of them. Through good times and bad, human nature and personal shortcomings weaken men to temptations and corruptive opportunities. Tempers still flare. Greed still makes the eyes widen.

Wherever hordes of teenage boys were gathered, sex peddlers could smell the testosterone from miles away. Military bases were an obvious hot spot, with thousands of draftees assembled as they awaited assignment overseas. Savvy brothel owners set up shop nearby. Police tried to crack down; in San Francisco, officers swept through the seedy sections, closing prostitution houses. But keeping the places closed proved to be about as simple as eliminating alcohol during Prohibition.

Younger boys who were not heading off to war found plenty of trouble of their own. With dads overseas and moms working long hours in jobs supporting the war effort, no one was home to watch the kids. The term “juvenile delinquency” first became popular during the war, when crime among youths increased by as much as 50 percent over the prewar rate. Petty theft, vandalism,

and unarmed violence were the most common offenses.

More typically adult crimes took off, too. When the government began to ration scarce goods, things looked bright for criminals who earned their keep in the black market. The average American accepted sacrifice for the war effort. Others did whatever was necessary to get what they wanted. It was they who kept the black market in business. One popular black-market scam was to make counterfeit government ration coupons, which could be turned in to unwitting business proprietors for the right to buy regulated goods, particularly gasoline. A blunter method was to steal coveted scarcities outright and resell them, perhaps on a street corner with a whispered line like “Psst, wanna buy some tires?” Most black-marketeers, however, were actually owners of legitimate businesses, who concocted clever ways to skirt rationing laws and price controls.

There was little hope of making a dent in crime during war. Too many policemen had swapped their blues for khakis and gone overseas to fight. Creative mayors and police chiefs looked to fill the holes by hiring men rejected for military service and older men to perform duties that weren’t physically taxing, such as traffic control. Regular officers were then freed up for more critical assignments.

The end of the war brought no respite from crime, at least not right away. When the Japanese surrender was announced nationwide on August 14, 1945, civilians and servicemen alike flocked to the streets and into bars to celebrate. Many of them, drunk and pumped up with adrenaline, found ways to release their pent-up energy. San Francisco suffered a three-day binge of vandalism and looting. The weakened police department couldn’t control the mobs.

Despite all the wartime opportunities for making money illegally and conditions that were conducive to crime, the overall crime rate actually dipped slightly over the war years. That was most likely due to pure statistical reality. Two key factors in crime were missing: young men and want of money. Many males who might otherwise be breaking the law were out of the country with the military, and those who remained behind were working in well-paying war-related jobs. ★

CARL ZEBROWSKI, editor of *America in WWII*, has written about the US home front and war-era music since the magazine’s first issue.

Shackles and chains bind Latino men (opposite) arrested in June 1943’s so-called Zoot-Suit Riots in Los Angeles.

Running street battles broke out between servicemen on leave and zoot-suit-clad civilian minority men.

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Kids, Mickey, and Poison Gas



COURTESY OF DAVID LESIAK

PERHAPS NOTHING CAPTURES THE ABNORMALITY OF WARTIME LIFE like a photo of parents encouraging their preschooler to wear a gas mask and tuck her dolly into a gas-inhibiting tent for infants. But in early 1942, with the United States suddenly at war against Japan, Germany, and Italy, adults were sick with worry. What if enemy planes dropped poison gas on American cities? Such an attack could kill thousands, including children.

Hindsight would reveal the unlikeliness of such an attack. But the Americans of 1942 had no such assurance, so they prepared for the worst. Government gas masks for civilians were sized only for adults. Sensing a need, Sun Rubber Company cut a deal with Walt Disney Productions and produced a friendly, kid-sized Mickey Mouse gas mask. The mask featured Mickey's cheery face and perky ears; the bright yellow filter canister was trimmed in red and bore another smiling Mickey.

The little girl in the publicity photo above is wearing a prototype mask, with a generic army canister. She seems to have accepted the mask, and to be taking the gas-mask drill in stride.

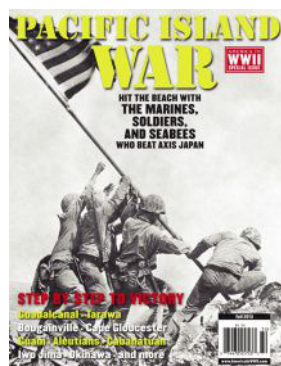
Most kids never saw a Mickey Mouse gas mask. War rationing diverted rubber to military production, forcing Sun to halt its project after producing about 1,000 masks. Fortunately, kids never needed them. But the fact that their parents thought they might reveals the uncertainty in the heart of people at war.

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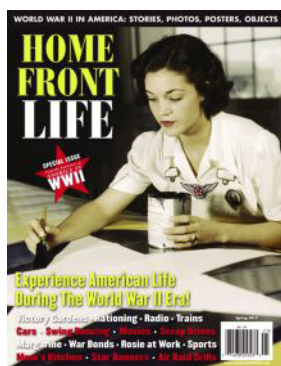
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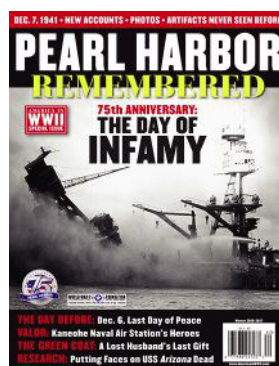
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